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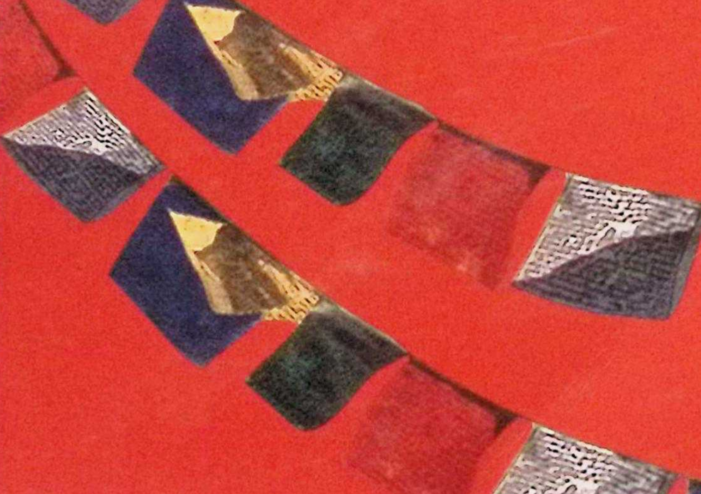
Stories and Customs of
MANANG

As told by the Lamas and Elders of Manang

Compiled by
Liesl Messerschmidt
Tsering Dolma Gurung
Frances Klatzel

Contributions by
Mukhiya N Lama
Tashi Wangyel Ghale
Tashi Rapten Ghale



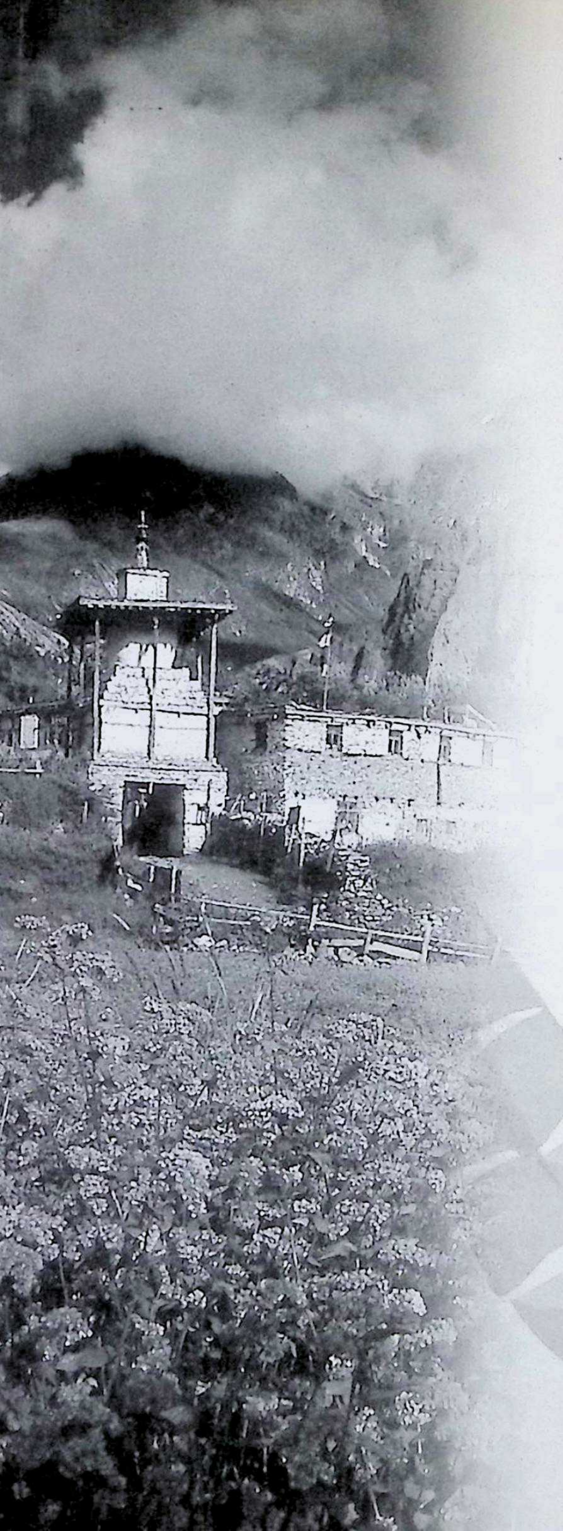


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Table of Contents

Foreword, Introduction, and Thanks

SECTION 1:
INTRODUCTION TO OUR LAND AND CULTURE 1
Chapter 1: Our Land 3
Chapter 2: Our People 11
Chapter 3: Religion in Manang and the Himalaya 19

SECTION 2:
STORIES OF OUR VILLAGES AND GOMPAS 39
Chapter 4: Stories of Gyasumdo, Lower Manang 41
Chapter 5: Stories of Nyeshang, Upper Manang 53
Chapter 6: Stories of Nar 75

SECTION 3:
OUR LIVING TRADITIONS 81
Chapter 7: Daily Life 83
Chapter 8: Ceremonies and Rituals 91
Chapter 9: Festivals 97

Glossary 104
Bibliography 111

Foreword, Introduction, and Thanks

This book is for the curious, for those of you who wish to delve into the life and times, current and past, of the people of Manang so that you may experience more than just the powerful river gorges and mountain peaks.

We hope to introduce you to the rich cultural history, dynamic geography, and melodic languages of the Manang Valley. By presenting the oral tradition of legends and myths, we hope to evoke a deeper understanding and appreciation for the adventurous and spiritual *Manangpa* people, the age-old fortress ruins, the Buddhist *gompas* (temples) and monasteries, the *lamas* and monks, hand-crafted spiritual artefacts, and colourful festivals.

We have divided this book into sections exploring the ancestry, history, geography, settlement, religion, culture, festivals, and everyday life practices of the people of Manang. It is one of the first attempts to record some of the ancient and unique history of Manang by compiling stories and legends passed down from generation to generation in the great oral tradition of the area.

This book is the compilation of information collected by several people interested in the culture of Manang. Destination Manang presented us with the incentive needed to compile and prepare a presentation of this history. We had also observed that the this oral history was being lost to time, particularly as the elders of Manang society pass on, and the younger generation yearns to "modernize" and adopt more "Western" cultural values, behaviours, and traditions, often to the neglect of their own.

Oral history being what it is, we encountered many versions of the existing stories, as told by the lamas, elders, and learned people of Manang. In an effort to present the narrative in a chronological, as well as geographical order, we worked like detectives to stitch bits and pieces of the greater tales of Manang together to form the fabric of this book. In an effort to preserve the flavour of the oral tradition, stories are presented in first person wherever possible, as the *Manangpa* tell them.

In some cases, only fragments of stories still exist in living memory, while at other times the narrative is more comprehensive and riddled with interesting geographical clues and historical references. Where variations of the stories exist, we have taken the liberty of selecting the narrative that best fits the chronological tale. While some stories might not be historically accurate, they hint at a historical reality to explain natural and other phenomena. Although academic scholars may question some of the details, we have endevoured to tell the stories from the point of view of the people of Manang.

We had more contact with people from Upper Manang, and so there is a predominance of stories from this area as compared to lower Manang and Nar. In order to complete the book within the

Destination Manang year, we did not have the time necessary to travel repeatedly to lower Manang and Nar for more stories specific to those areas, as we did in upper Manang.

We hope that this book will have two audiences: visitors who are unfamiliar with Manang and its history, and the youth of Manang. Our hope is that the book will inspire them to rejuvenate cultural traditions and encourage the active preservation of legends, family histories, and age-old practices. These stories, legends, and myths belong to the people of Manang, so we encourage and invite feedback on our presentation of history, as remembered through the ancient practice of storytelling.

This book is the product of our team work and the support of the many people. We wish to thank many people for their contributions to this book, without which there would be no oral history to record. The following list may not contain minor informants and others who assisted in many ways towards the collection and interpretation of stories from and about Manang.

For those whose name we have, and whose voice is found within the following narrative, ORCHẸ-O (THANK YOU) to Akhay Dob Tsering, Akhay Chong Nurba Ghale, Jigme Ghale, Sepa Lakpa Ghale, Akhay Chesang, Dolma Gurung, Akhay Jamling Gurung, Kabindra Gurung, Naresh Gurung, Sonam Gurung (Braga), Akhay Jugmi, Lama Kungsang, Ritar Lakpa, Gyalchen Lama, Khenpo Kunga Ghale Lama, Lama Pintcho, Akhay Rabken, Ngawal Akhay Sangay, Sonam Sangmo, Lama Tashi (Praken Gompa), Karma Tsering (Braga), Lama Tsering, and Kyung Me Sonam Wongmo.

Mukhiya N. Lama, Tashi R. Ghale, and Tashi W. Ghale gave or helped us get significant amounts of information for the book. For final review of the book we would like to thank Mukhiya N. Lama, Lama Phuntsok, and Don Messerschmidt. Dr. Jayaraj Acharya, linguist, reviewed the glossary.

The photographs were provided by Tashi R. Ghale, Mukhiya N. Lama, Palden Tsering Sherpa, Brent Willey, Tsering Dolma Gurung, Betty Woodsend, Don Messerschmidt, Sara McMillian, Frances Klatzel, and Liesl Messerschmidt. Bidur Dangol of Shangrila Maps kindly allowed us to use his maps.

We would lastly like to thank the staff of Format Graphic Studio, especially Suresh Shrestha, for their patient work on the final layout and the staff of Mera Publications, especially Roshan Sunuwar, for giving enthusiastic logistical support.

Liesl Messerschmidt
Tsering Dolma Gurung
Frances Klatzel

November 2004

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KARMA LEKSHEY LING INSTITUTE
for higher Buddhist studies Regd. No: 1216

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Mera Publications has recently produced this new book on the spread of Buddhism and the local traditions throughout the regions of Nyishang or Manang. It Presents a new examination of how early traditions and customs were practiced and should serve as a mirror for clearly understanding the old ways and pre-modern aspects of their societies.

I would therefore like to thank the authors and publishers for presenting these traditions of pre-modern society, thereby opening an excellent gateway on the skillful path for entering the tradition of peace and happiness. In addition, I pray that this will generate interest in the systems of Dharma Practice and study which are part of the path to peace and happiness.

Written by the Supreme Dharma Master Lama Phuntsok at Karma Lekshey Ling Shedra, on the fifteenth day of the tenth month, 2004.

May this be meaning ful!

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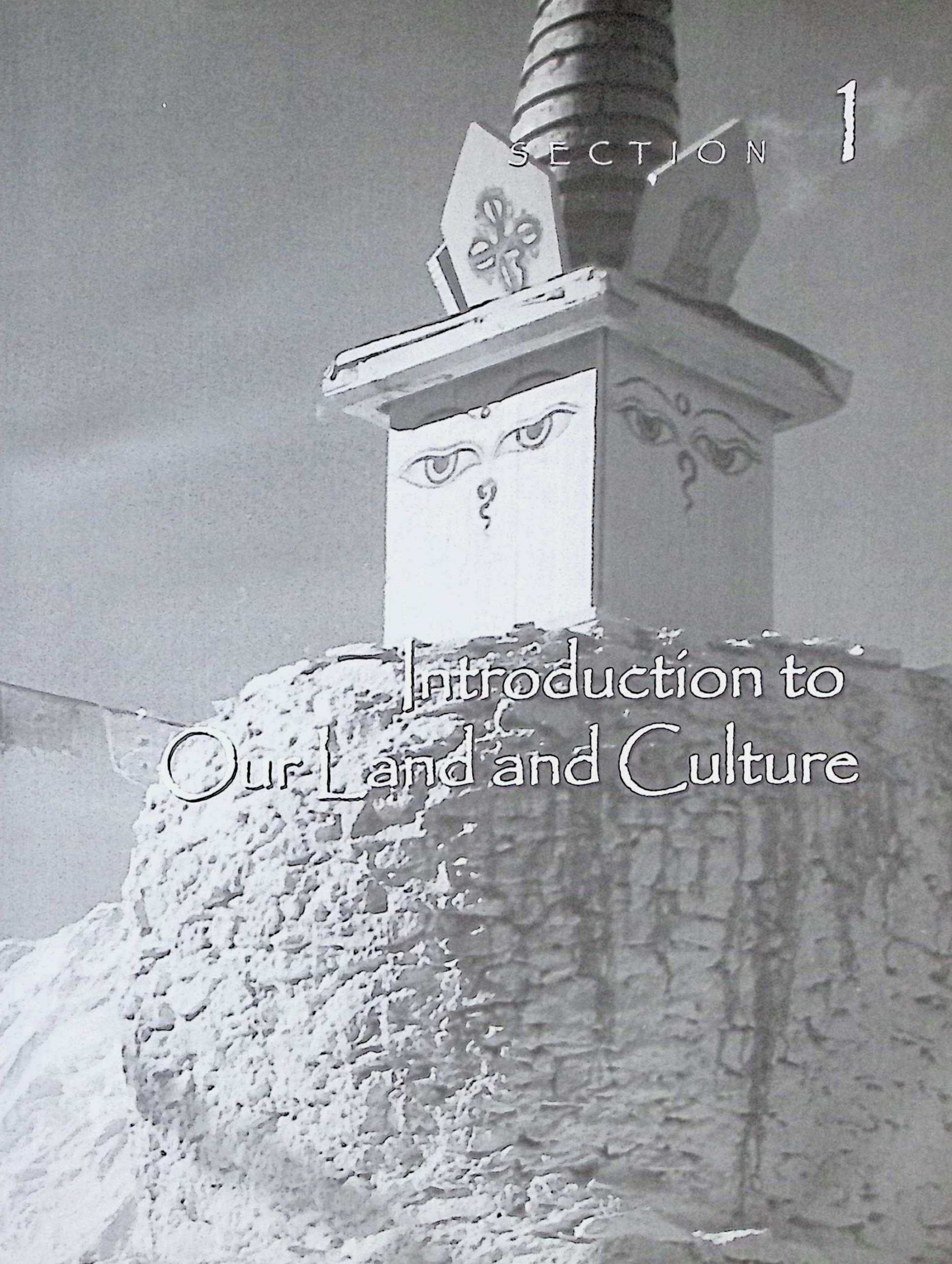
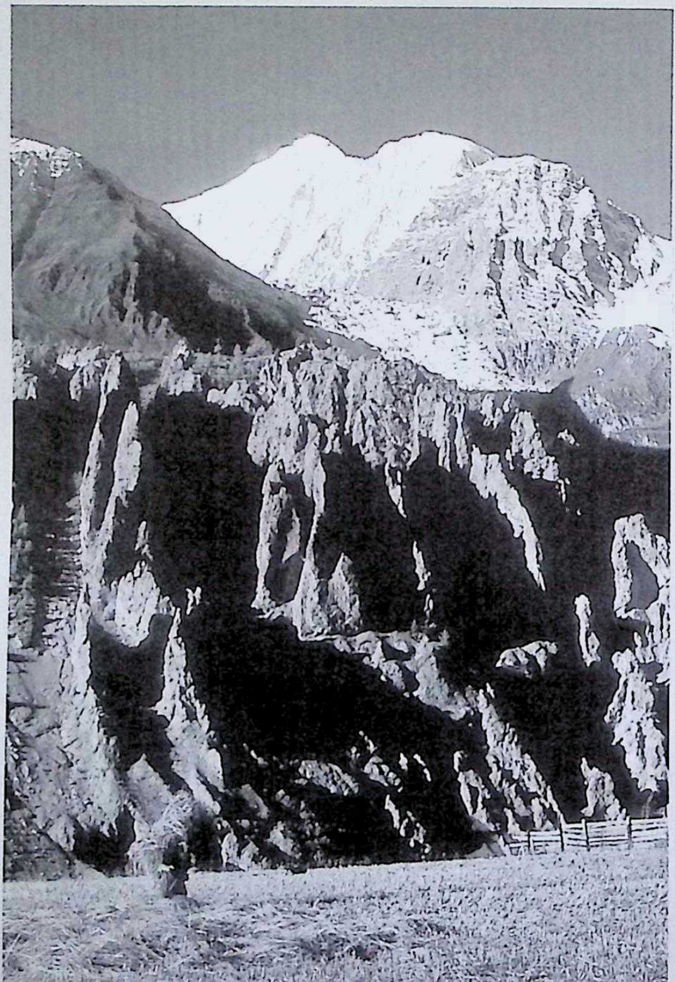


SECTION 1

Introduction to Our Land and Culture



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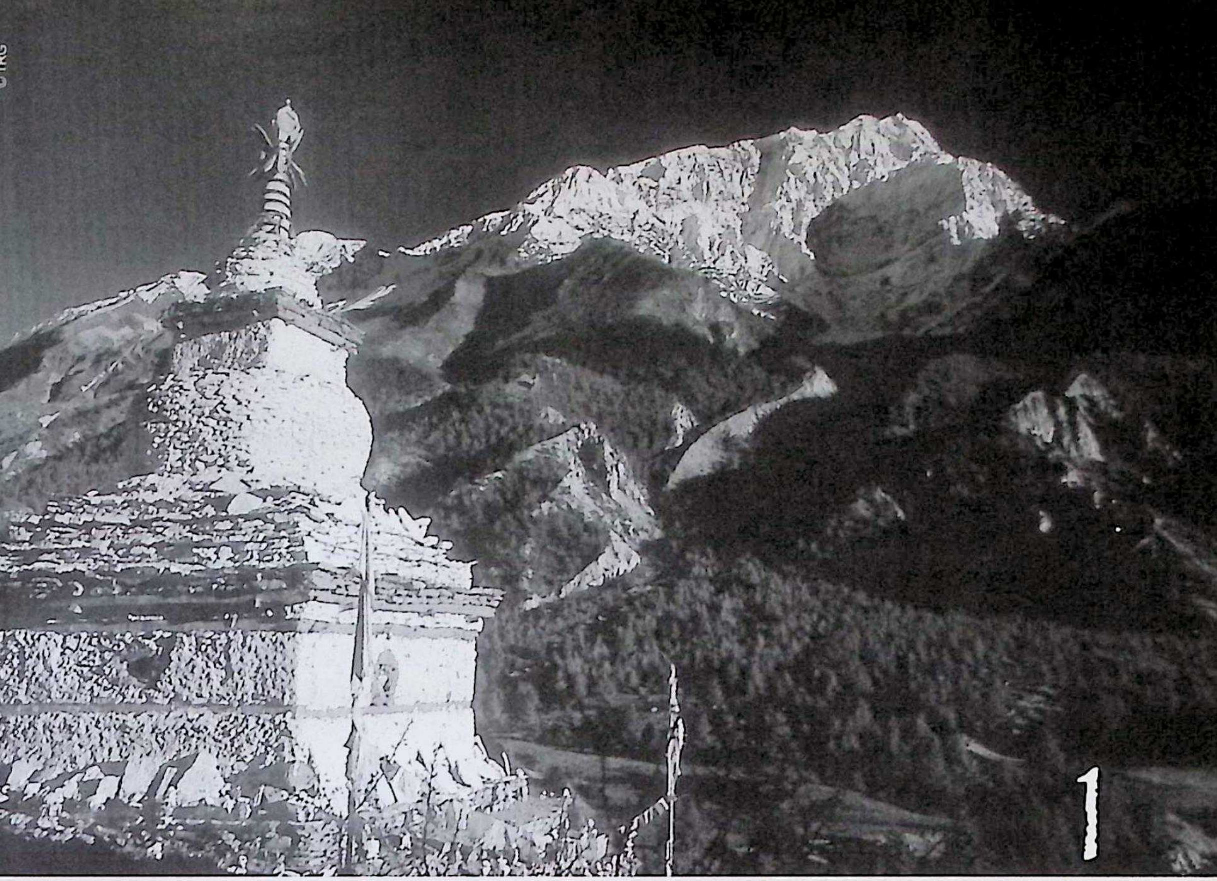

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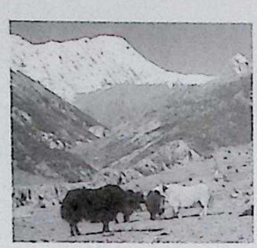
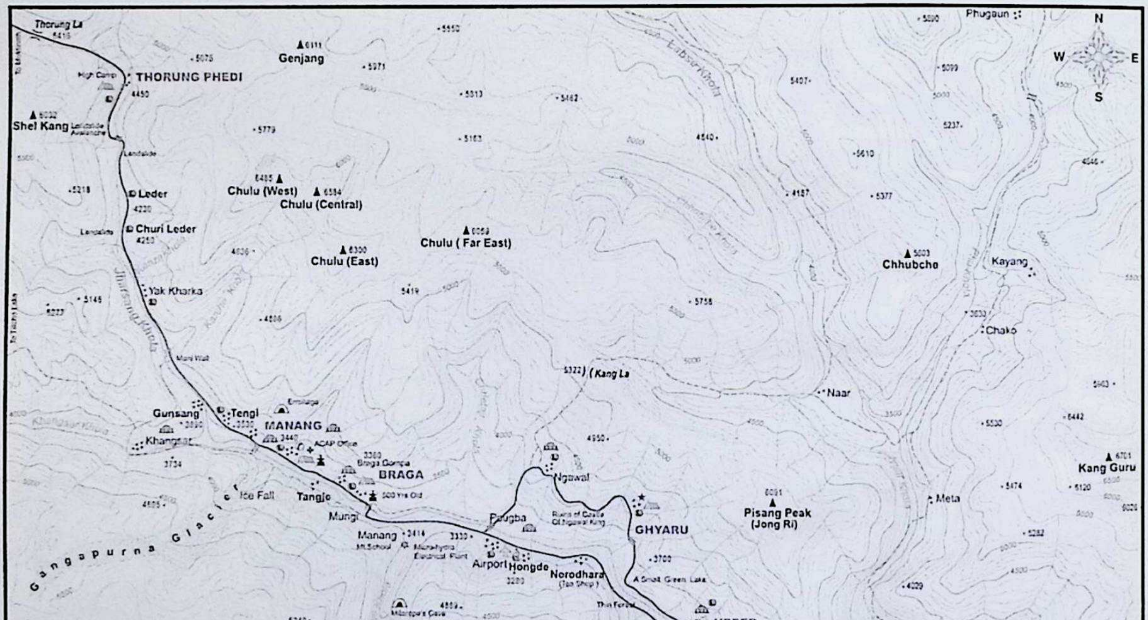
CHAPTER

Our Land



Our Land


Thorung La
5416
THORUNG PHEDI
High Camp
4450
Shel Kang
Genjang
Leder
4230
Churi Leder
4250
Chulu (West)
Chulu (Central)
Chulu (East)
Chulu (Far East)
Yak Kharka
Jharsang Khola
Mani Wall
Gunsang
Tengi
MANANG
Khangsar
ACAP Office
Braga Gompa
BRAGA
500 Yrs Old
Ice Fall
Tangjo
Mungi
Manang
Gangapurna Glacier
Gangapurna Himal
Annapurna III
East Annapurna Glacier
Gandharba Chuli
Annapurna IV
Annapurna II
Airport
Hongde
Norodhara
(Tea Shop)
Paugba
Ngawal
(Kang La
GHYARU
A Small Green Lake
Milarepa's Cave
Open only in summer Time
Thin Forest
UPPER PISANG
LOWER PISANG
Avalanche
Pisang Peak
(Jong Ri)
Labse Khola
Naar
Chhubcho
Kayang
Chako
Meta
Kang Guru
Phugaun
Chachna
Marsyangdi River
Bratang
Land Slide
Thaleku
CHAME
Koto
Thanchok
Lata Marang
Timang Besi
District Headquarters of Manang
N
W
E
S

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Our Mountain Place

If there is one thing we are proud of in Manang, it is our spectacular mountain scenery.

In fact, the mountains shape everything about Manang District.

As part of the Annapurna Circuit trek, Manang Valley is special for the mountains rising directly from the valley floor, which averages 3,400 meters (11,000 feet) in elevation. The Manang Valley is surrounded by mountains over 6,000 meters (20,000 feet) high on all sides. These include:

- **Lamjung Himal** (6,932 meters or 22,740 feet)
- **Pisang Peak** (6,091 meters or 19,982 feet)
- **Annapurna I, II, III and IV** (8091 meters or 26,538 feet; 7,939 meters or 26,040 feet; 7,555 meters or 24,780 feet; and 7,525 meters or 24,682 feet respectively),
- **Gangapurna** (7,454 meters or 24,449 feet)
- **Tarkekang** or Glacier Dome (7,202 meters or 23,623 feet)
- **Chulu East** and **Chulu West** (6,558 meters or 21,510 feet respectively)
- **Tilicho Peak** (7,134 meters or 23,400 feet)

The Annapurna *Himal* (Mountain) range is a wall of rock and ice with peaks over 8,000 meters (26,000 feet) and a continuous height above 5,500 meters (18,000 feet). It is over 60 kilometres (40 miles) long. In the Nepali language, Annapurna means 'full of grain'.

Manang District is 150 kilometres (93 miles) northwest of Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, and covers an area of 2,246 square kilometres (1,395 square miles). Several districts border it including Gorkha to the east, Lamjung to the southeast, Kaski to the south, Myagdi to the southwest, Mustang to the west, and the Tibet Autonomous Region to the north in China. Manang district is part of the Annapurna Conservation Area.[1]

---

[1] The Annapurna Conservation Area Project was launched by the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation in 1986 to safeguard the area's environment, resources, communities, and subsistence activities.

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Most of Manang District is high, arid, and isolated. It sits in the rain shadow on the northern side of the Himalaya and enjoys a much drier climate than other areas of Nepal on the southern slopes of the mountains.

Our winters are beautiful, white, and severely cold, and our summers dry. The mountains block the monsoon rains that come from the southeast from reaching Manang.

The Three Regions of Manang District

Manang District has three regions: Gyasumdo, Nyeshang, and Nar. Geological, ecological, geographical, cultural, and religious features determine these three regions.

Gyasumdo is the southeastern-most and lowest region in Manang and is often called 'lower Manang'. It stretches from the villages of Thonje to Brathang. Gyasumdo means the 'meeting place of the three trails', referring to the tracks along the three *kholas* (rivers), the Marshyangdi Khola, the Dudh Khola, and the Nar Khola.

> Gyasumdo is where people meet when traveling from Lamjung (to the south), Tibet (to the north), and upper Manang (to the northwest). We call the people from Gyasumdo *Gyasumdo-ten*, meaning they 'sit' in Gyasumdo.

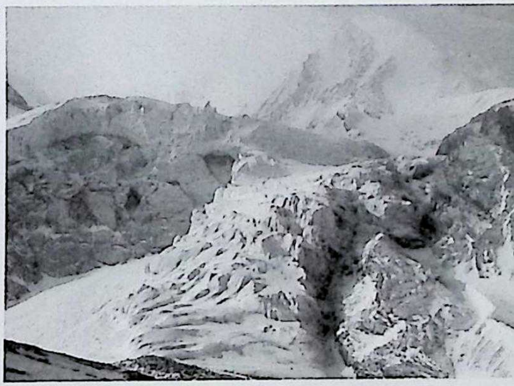
Nyeshang is the Tibetan name for the largest of the three regions, the 'upper' Manang Valley. The name derives from an area of Tibet called Shang. It stretches from the villages of Pisang at the lower east end to Khangsar at the upper west end. Nyeshang is the largest valley of Manang District. It is also the location of the original three villages of Manang, namely Ngawal and Ghyaru (formerly one village), Braga, and Manang Village.

The Nepali government kept the upper Manang Valley above the village of Chame (in Gyasumdo) closed to outsiders until 1977. This was partly because Tibetan Khampa guerrillas were using the valley as a base from which to fight the Chinese. A violent and lengthy feud between the villages of upper Manang also made travel in the valley risky. The people from upper Manang are *Nyeshang-ten* and the language *Nyeshangte.*

Nar is remote and rugged, and therefore, very difficult to reach. There are two routes into Nar. One begins in the canyon across from the village of Koto, and the other is over the Kang-La pass above the village of Ngawal. This region has only two main villages, the lower Nar Village, and the upper Phu. Both are at extremely high elevations. Sometimes the area is called Nar-Phu. People from Nar are *Nar-ten.*

Geology: The Creation of the Land

> In one of our religious books, it is written that the Buddha foretold that a country of snowy hills and lakes would be drained and dried. Later, from a hillside in Tibet, the deity of compassion, Chenrezig, saw all the valleys of the Himalaya and Tibet covered by water.
>
> Snow or forest covered all the hills, and many beings lived there. Chenrezig meditated to drain the water from this land, to send all the beings to *Dewachen* Buddhist heaven, and to bring religion to the people who would inhabit this country. This is how our land was created.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Both religion and science can explain the world around us and in both stories, for the land was originally covered by water. About 140 to 165 million years ago, a prehistoric sea separated the ancient continents of Laurasia (including Asia) and Gondwanaland (including India).

Eventually the Indian subcontinent split from Gondwanaland and moved north towards Laurasia. About 65 million years ago, the two continents drifted together and Gondwanaland began to go under Laurasia.

This started the continuous uplift of the Himalaya and the Tibetan Plateau. The Marshyangdi River was already flowing south and carved the gorge as the mountains were lifted up around it. Currently, the Himalaya rise about 5 centimeters a year. Manang, as elsewhere in the Himalaya, experiences many earthquakes and tremors as the land shifts and adjusts to the continuous pressure from the advancing Indian subcontinent. Meanwhile, the rivers carved V-shaped valleys, then the glaciers of the Ice Ages widened the valleys into flat-bottomed, steep-sided U-shapes.

The **Great Wall of Pisang** is a steep, smooth wall of rock dividing Gyasumdo (lower Manang) and Nyeshang (upper Manang). It is called Oble Dome in the ethnic Gurung language, Yuga Drag Thang in Tibetan, and Swarga Danda in Nepali (*danda* refers to a large hill). All these names mean essentially the 'Mountain of Heaven'. This huge arc of slate sweeps 1,200 meters (3,800 feet) upwards from the valley floor, and is probably the upturned section of an ancient lakebed. Some of the legends associated with this wonder are presented later in this book.

Oble Dome

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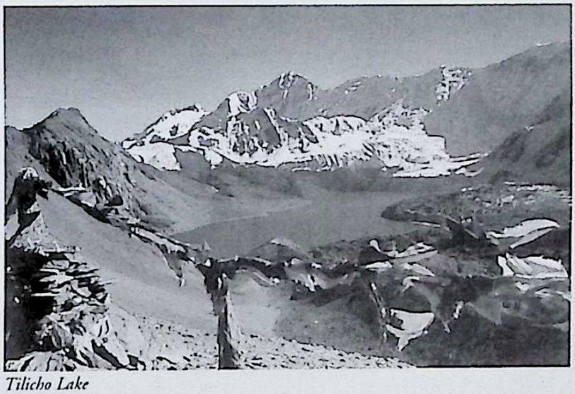
Lakes: Features of Spiritual Significance

Manang has many lakes with religious significance. Many of the lakes have descriptive names, or refer to prominent deities.

> Between Pisang and Ghyaru villages, in the forest, is a beautiful lake of a startling turquoise colour. We call it **Mrie-Kyo**. Mrie means 'turquoise' or 'jade', and Kyo means 'water' in Nyeshangte. We believe the water is a gift from the deities.
>
> **Khangla Tso** is a lake above Ngawal on the way to Nar. When you look into the water of this lake the reflection is not upside down but right side up, which is quite surprising. If there is no rainfall we go to this lake, and to Yungal Tso and Theta Tso, so that the rains will come.

Kyu Tso Lake is a lake high above the village of Braga at about 4,600 meters (15,000 feet). The name means 'vast lake' and it is also called Kyapar Tso. It is written as Gya Tso in many maps. Tso means 'lake' in Tibetan.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Tilicho Lake

Tilicho Lake is at nearly 5,000 meters (16,000 feet) above sea level. Tilicho, correctly spelled 'Tili Tso', is one of the highest lakes in the world. The lake is the collected glacial melt waters from the northern slopes of Annapurna I and Thorong Peaks. The Hindus regard Tilicho Lake as a sacred lake where the deity Shiva and his consort Parbati bathed.

Gangapurna Lake is in the valley below Manang Village. It holds the melt water of the glaciers on Gangapurna.

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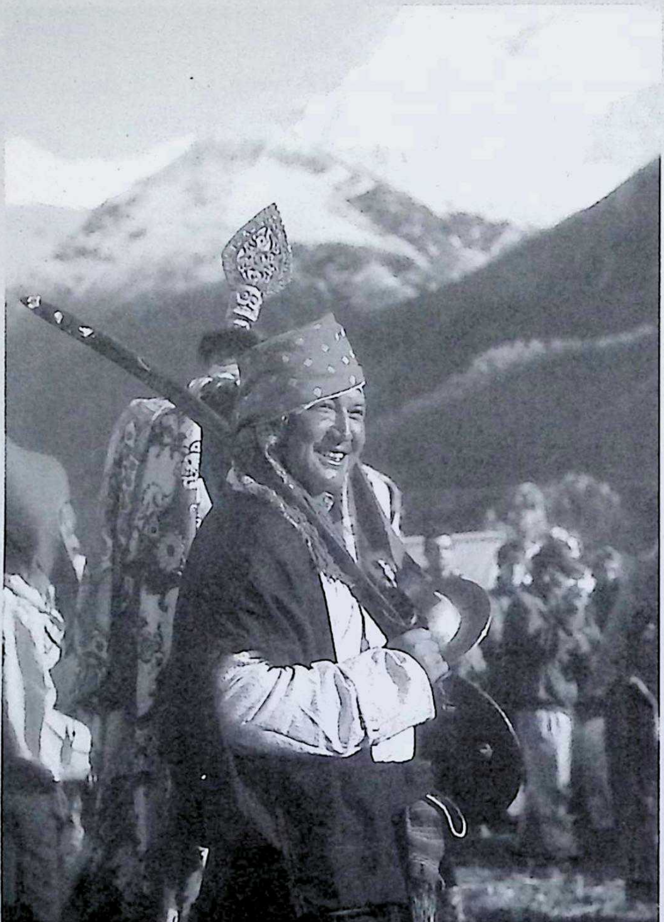
Gangapurna Lake



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CHAPTER

Our People

Our People

How We Came to Live Here

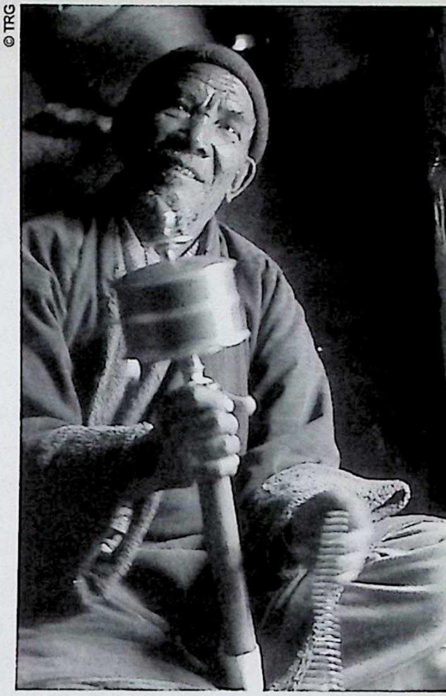
We do not know exactly from where we came or when we first settled the Manang Valley.

In Tibetan, those of us from upper Manang are called *Nyeshangpa,* which means 'people from Shang', a place in Tibet. Some of our elders believe that we may have ethnic origins in highland Nepal's Manaslu and Jumla regions, Tibet, Mongolia, and even China.

No one knows exactly where the *Manangpa* (people from Manang) came from. Historians believe that they may have arrived at several different times. The first people to migrate to Manang were probably nomads similar to those still living on the Tibetan Plateau, hunting and searching for food or for yak pastures.

Other people came when Buddhism came to Tibet. They followed the ancient Bonpo religion and instead of converting to Buddhism, they moved to remote valleys in the Himalaya, one of which was upper Manang. There is also speculation that ethnic Gurung shepherds from the middle hills of Nepal occupied upper Manang prior to the arrival of the Manangpa.

We tell a story of six men who traveled down from the north searching for places to settle. Two men went to Thak Khola, two went to the Nar Khola, and two came to the Manang Valley. These two men found the valley of Manang to be an ideal place to live and returned later with their families. Thirteen generations after these first settlers came to Manang, the Tibetan King Sokbarjungar exiled many people from Lhasa (in Tibet) for disobeying his rule. These people also came to Manang.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Oral stories suggest that the first Manangpa settled the upper Manang Valley around 600 A.D. There is no written document describing the settlement of Manang, but stories of the Buddhist yogi and poet Milarepa (11th century) mention people living here.

Manang was not always separate from Tibet, nor always a part of Nepal. Centuries ago, the king of a region of Tibet, named Thongjeri, captured Manang and made it part of his territory. Five generations after Thongjeri died, during the 600s, another king of Tibet, Srongtsen Gonpo, married Bhrikuti, the daughter of the King of Bhaktapur, one of three principalities in the Kathmandu Valley. At this time, King Srongtsen Gonpo gave up the control of Manang as a conciliatory gesture.

The earliest written records suggest that the rulers of Manang paid tribute to the Se-Rib Kingdom of Mustang in the 1100s, then to the Gungthang Kingdom of southern Tibet in the late 1200s, and to the Kingdom of Lo in upper Mustang in the 1400s.

The Marshyangdi River Gorge: The Way to Manang

The Marshyangdi Khola is one of the few rivers that cuts through the heart of the Himalayan Mountains. It has cut a beautiful but dangerous gorge between the villages of Syange and Thonje.

The river followed this course before the Himalaya were uplifted. The gorge formed as the mountains lifted and the river kept cutting its way through the layers of rock. The actual divide between waters flowing through Nepal or Tibet is further north at the edge of the Tibetan Plateau.

The main trail to Manang follows Marshyangdi Khola Gorge up from the south. The trail in the gorge gives travelers a sense of the difficulty that the local people have faced for centuries in traversing their land. However, the trail of today is very different than the one used in the past.

© DM, 1964

The old trail snaked up and down the cliffs often on bamboo ladders, far above the Marshyangdi Khola. In the 1970s, the Nepali government blasted out and widened the tracks across the cliffs for the convenience of trekkers and mule trains. The old trail is now over grown, but can still be glimpsed where it crosses the high cliffs above.

© DM, 1964

Cascading off the cliffs into the river are spectacular waterfalls, some over 300 meters high. There are also many hot springs, called *tato pani* (hot water) that are famous for their healing properties. Some local villagers believe that these hot springs have lost their healing powers due to the masses of people, especially trekkers, who frequent them now and 'pollute' their once pure waters.

The Villages of the Marshyangdi River Gorge

In the past, there were only a few settlements in the Marshyangdi Gorge. Most villages on the trail today moved down from the hillsides when the trail was moved and rebuilt. Hotels, teashops, and deforestation are new since the early 1980s when the area opened up for trekkers.

Syange is the first settlement at the entrance to the gorge. Literally clinging to the cliff in close proximity to the roaring river, the name of the village refers to the sound 'syang syang'. In the ethnic Gurung language, this reflects the sound made by the nearby waterfall on the Syange Khola. This waterfall can be seen best from the east side of the Marshyangdi Khola, at the edge of the fields before the trail drops down to the bridge.

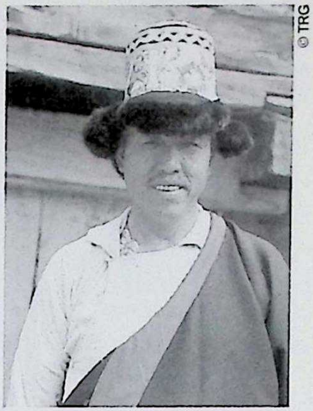
The next village along the gorge is **Jagat**, which means 'toll station'. Jagat was one of several tax collection points along the trail at the time of the salt trade with Tibet.

Chamje is a small village of Gurung and Lama Tibetans. The name comes from *tsham*, a wild citrus fruit that does not grow above this point, and je, meaning 'farmland.' A huge overhanging cliff or rock shelter called an *odaar* dominates the village. In the old days, porters carrying rice and salt used to sleep in this *odaar*. Shepherds continue to use many similar such cliff overhangs and caves when traveling to and from the higher grazing grounds with their flocks of sheep.

Sattale is a village of only a few houses and fields on a recently deforested hillside. The name means the place of seven turns. (However, you may disagree with this calculation, for as you wind your way up from Chamje it seems like many more than seven turns.)

Tal marks your arrival at the upper end of Lamjung District, and your entrance into Manang. Tal is an ancient lake bed.

The Cultural Divide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Most Manangpas living above the Great Wall are Tibetan Buddhists, who prohibit animal sacrifice. The Manangpa people who live below the wall practice animistic Shamanism mixed in with Hinduism and regularly sacrifice animals in their rituals. Centuries ago, ethnic Gurung shepherds inhabited upper Manang until the Ghale rulers captured it. It is said that the Ghale kings banished Shamanism to the lower valleys and replaced it with Buddhism. Though Buddhists and Shamanists are neighbours and live together quite harmoniously most of the time, the issue of blood sacrifice has been contentious.

> We tell a story that many generations ago a Buddhist Lama from Ghyaru became enraged with the people practicing Shamanism in the area. No matter how much he tried, he could not get them to stop sacrificing animals. With no other option, he forced them out of upper Manang to live further down the Marshyangdi Khola in lower Manang and Lamjung District. After they left, he straddled the river and defecated in the water, a symbolic gesture separating the Buddhists from the Shamanists.

(The people living downriver have a different story and interpretation of these events.)

Our People and Clans

> We call ourselves *Nyangmi,* meaning 'our people.' We are also called *Manangpa* or *Manangbhot* meaning the 'people of Manang.' We call the people who live below the village of Tal *Rongpa,* or 'lowland people.'[2]
>
> Until recently, the Rongpa called us *Bhotiya,* which means 'people from Bhot' (border areas of the Himalaya including Tibet), and we had no surnames. We only adopted surnames when we first needed them for travel documents. Since the

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[2] The Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu use the same word to refer to people from the lower hills and plains of Nepal.

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(ethnic) Gurungs were our closest neighbours, many of us adopted 'Gurung' as our last name, even though our dress and culture are more similar to Tibetans. Some people thought that the name 'Gurung' helped to keep the Rongpa from dominating us, for they respected Gurungs more than Bhotiya.

However, our Nyeshangte language is similar to Gurung but has many Tibetan words.

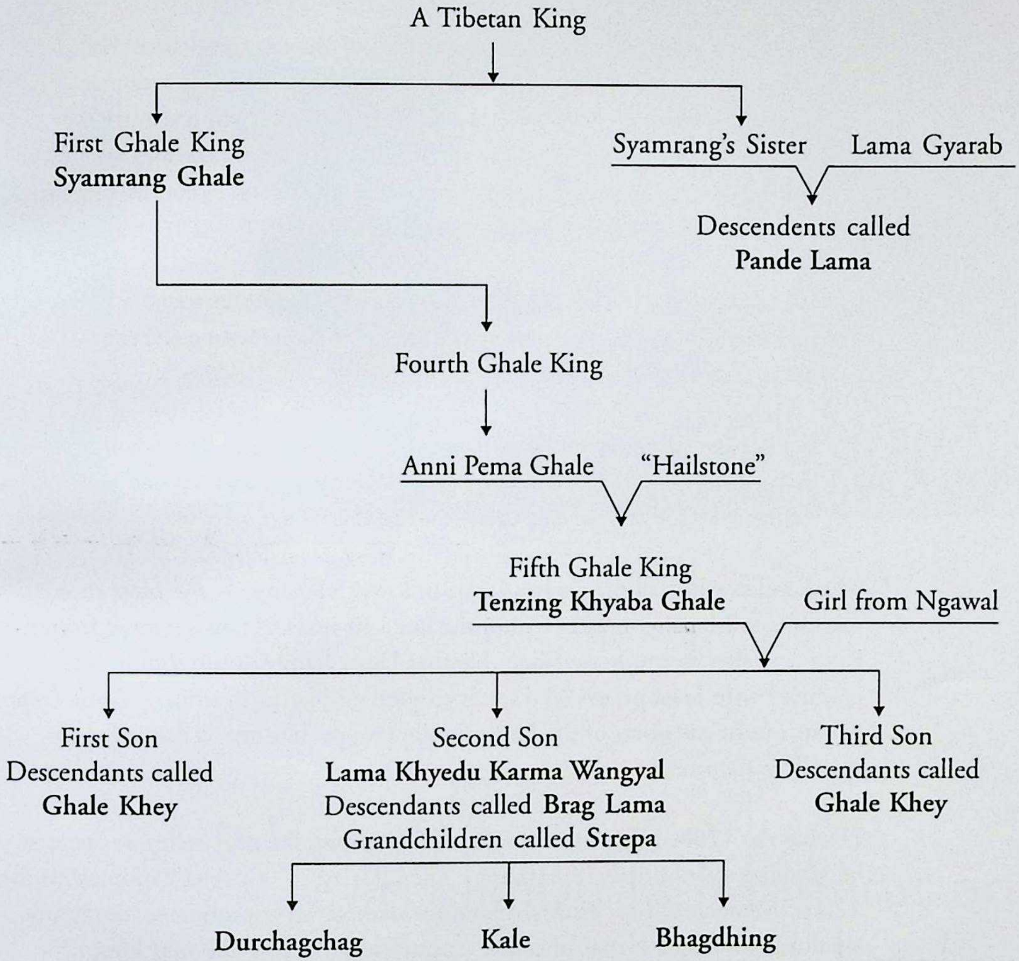
Scholars classify the Nyeshangte language as belonging to the Gurung branch of the Bodish section of the Tibeto-Burman family of Sino-Tibetan languages.

There are four ethnic clans, or *khy,* among the people of upper Manang, and many paternal sub-clans, or *phopey*.

A long time ago, the fifth Ghale King of Manang had a son who lived in Braga and had become a *lama*. This *lama's* grandchildren were called *Strepa* (prince or princess). The descendents of the Ghale Kings and the Strepa became the Ghale *khy* and all of them have adopted the title and surname 'Ghale'. The other three *khy,* Godhane, Lama, and Lamechhane, mostly use the surname 'Gurung'.

Some ethnic Gurungs from the middle hills call themselves by the four clan names: 'Ghale, Godhane, Lama, and Lamechhane.' These clans, and others, have a very complex set of marriage rules. Manangpa have adopted the same fourfold system of marriage preference between Gurung and Ghale family groups. People with the surname Ghale also live in other areas of Nepal, including bordering Gorkha District.

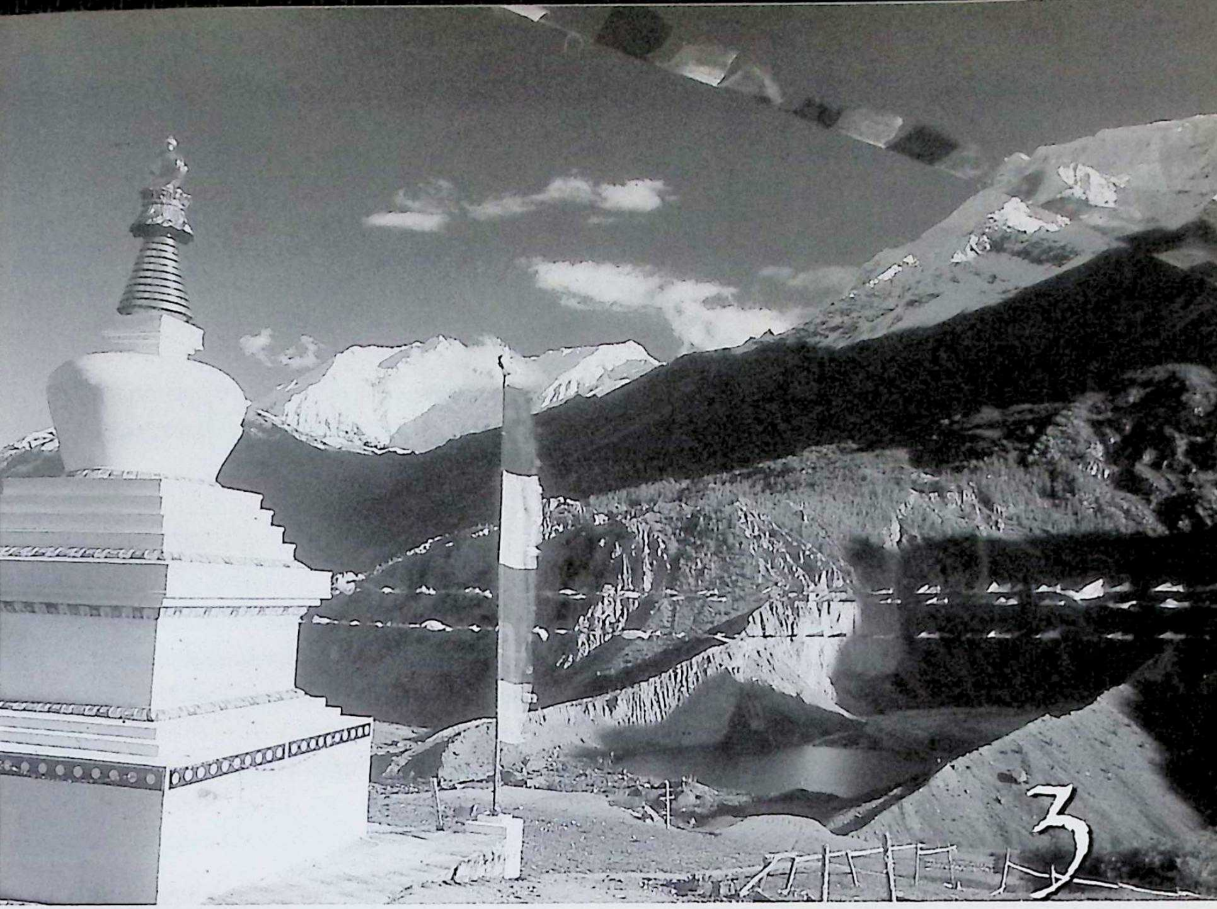
Ghale Family Group Tree


A Tibetan King
First Ghale King
Syamrang Ghale
Syamrang's Sister
Lama Gyarab
Descendents called
Pande Lama
Fourth Ghale King
Anni Pema Ghale
"Hailstone"
Fifth Ghale King
Tenzing Khyaba Ghale
Girl from Ngawal
First Son
Descendants called
Ghale Khey
Second Son
Lama Khyedu Karma Wangyal
Descendants called Brag Lama
Grandchildren called Strepa
Third Son
Descendants called
Ghale Khey
Durchagchag
Kale
Bhagdhing

> The **Ghale** were our rulers. Within the Ghale of Manang, there are two clans, the Brag Lama, and the Ghale Khey. The Brag Lama clan is divided again into Durchagchag, Kale, and Bhagdhing. The Champal Thogi Ghale came more recently from Jharkot in Mustang District.
>
> The Ghale settled mostly in upper Manang. The first Ghale King of Ngawal Village, Syamrang Ghale, came to Manang Valley from Tibet via Nar. Seeking to establish his kingdom, he fought with the (ethnic) Gurung shepherds of the area and eventually took control of the region. In this way, the Ghale from Nar established their dominance in upper Manang. Today, the ruins of red-stoned fortresses built by our Ghale rulers are on strategic cliff-tops in the Manang Valley.
>
> The **Godhane** clan is also called Khurdzong, and the **Lamechhane** *khy* Nhenzhornang. They are related to the Gurungs of lower Manang and upper Lamjung District in the middle hills.
>
> People of the name **Lama** in upper Manang are also Pande Lama. They are descendants of Lama Gyarab who founded Ghyaru and Ngawal Villages, and married the sister of Syamrang Ghale, the first Ghale King.

The families who call themselves Lama in lower Manang are the most recent migrants to Manang, mostly within the last 150 years. They migrated from the Kyirong Valley in southern Tibet. Neither Lama family group should be confused with *lama* priests who teach religion and perform rituals. Some *lama* priests can be members of the Lama family groups, but not all Lama family members are priests.

During the 1700s, relatives of the Raja of Mustang, the next valley to the west of Manang, ruled briefly in Manang. Then during the Gorkha Conquest in the 1760s, Manang fell to Prithivi Narayan Shah as he consolidated the many small kingdoms of Nepal into one country and became the first king of a unified Nepal.



3

CHAPTER

Religion in Manang and the Himalaya

Religion in Manang and the Himalaya

As you travel through Manang, you will notice numerous *gompas*, *chortens* (stupas, Buddhist monuments), *mani* walls (prayer walls), and other religious structures that show our dedication to spiritual pursuits. Religion is part of our daily lives. The religious objects constantly remind us of the Buddhist teachings. The names of places and our stories are tied closely to religious and spiritual practices.

How Buddhism Came to Manang

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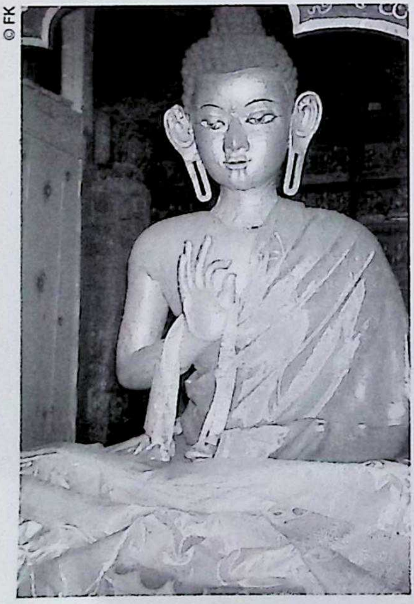

Today the people of the upper Manang Valley follow the teachings of the Buddha as practiced in the Tibetan form of Buddhism. The religious practices of the Manangpa have changed several times since they first came here. At first they practiced the religion of Tibet from before Buddhism was established.

It is said that we Manangpa actually first came here as refugees, who practiced the ancient Bon faith of Tibet. It was at the time when Guru Rinpoche had come to Tibet from India and was spreading Buddhism. The Bon people had to leave Tibet when Buddhism was chosen as the religion of Tibet.

Some Bon people came and settled in this wild valley of Manang. For many years, they followed Bon traditions, making animal sacrifices during *pujas* (rituals) and doing practices contrary to the Buddha *dharma* (religious practices).

Then, a *lama* came to Braga and taught us Buddhism. He taught that it is a sin to kill, hurt, or harm any living creature. Slowly, we turned to Buddhism. Now, everyone follows Buddhism and we are proud to call ourselves Buddhists.

To understand the Buddhism that we practice in Manang, we must first tell you about the Buddha and about how Guru Rinpoche brought Buddhism to Tibet.

The Buddha and Buddhism

The Buddha was born near Lumbini in southwest Nepal over 2500 years ago. Born from his mother's right side, he was sheltered from any human misery until the age of 29, when he left his princely life to seek a solution to humanity's suffering and began to practice meditation.

While meditating in northern India, the Buddha attained enlightenment, as complete wisdom and compassion. He taught the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, as means of spiritual growth until his death 45 years later.

Buddhism flourished in India for almost 1700 years and spread to South Asia, China, Central Asia, Japan, and the Kathmandu Valley. Over the years, it came to have three paths — Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. **Hinayana** Buddhism is practiced primarily in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and other places. **Mahayana** Buddhism is practiced in Tibet, China, and northern Nepal today, and is the 'middle' of the three paths. **Vajrayana** Buddhism was developed by Guru Rinpoche, who brought Buddhism to Tibet over 1260 years ago, where it eventually split into several different sects.

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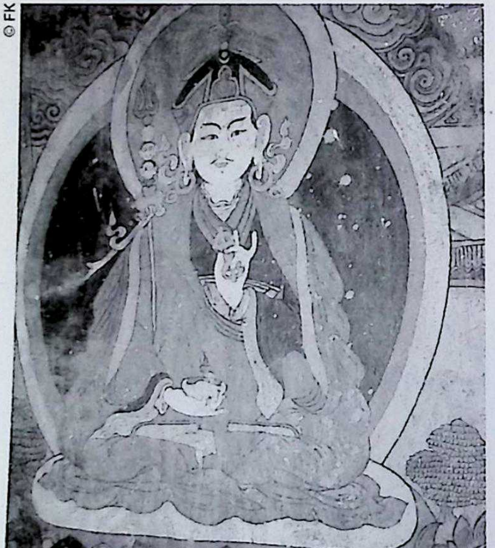
Sects of Tibetan Buddhism

Within Tibetan Buddhism, there are four sects. The **Nyingmapa** sect is the oldest and follows the original teachings and practices of Guru Rinpoche.

The **Kargyupa** sect is practised by most of the *lamas* in Manang, especially at Braga Gompa. Kargyupa started as new teachings by the philosopher Atisha. The **Shakya** teachings are followed at Bhojo and Tarey Gompas.

The **Gelukpa** sect was started by Lama Tsong Khapa in the 1400s. When the Mongols gained control of Tibet, they converted to Tibetan Buddhism and made the spiritual head of the Gelukpa sect, the Dalai Lama, the political head of Tibet. As the Gelukpa gained power, many followers of the older Nyingma, Kargyu, and Shakya sects moved to places in the Himalaya, like Manang, that were not under the direct control of Tibet.

Guru Rinpoche, the Kings of Tibet, and the Founding of Buddhism in Tibet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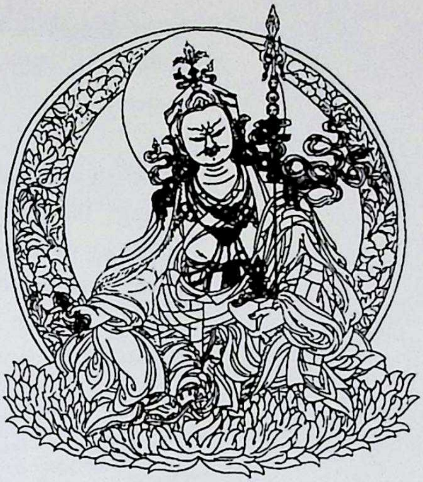
The first king of a unified Tibet was Songtsen Gampo, who ruled Tibet between from 618 to 649 AD. To form political alliances for his newly formed kingdom, he married two wives – Wen Cheng, from China, and Bhrikuti, from Bhaktapur, in what is now Nepal.

Through his Buddhist Nepali bride, Songtsen Gampo introduced Buddhism to Tibet. He is often shown wearing a white turban with a tiny red Amitabha Buddha poking out of the top.

However, Guru Rinpoche, also known as Padmasambhava in Sanskrit, is regarded as the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. He was born in a lotus flower in Ogyen (in the area of Pakistan known today as Swat), in the 700s.



Guru Rinpoche was teaching Vajrayana Buddhism in what is now India and Nepal when King Trisong Detsan of Tibet, who ruled from 755 to 797, invited him to Tibet. The king wanted to build the first monastery in Tibet and name it Samye, which means the 'return of the soul'. He appointed Lama Shantirakshita to oversee the construction, but many evil spirits hindered the completion of the *gompa*. Every morning, the workers would find their work of the previous day had been destroyed during the night. So, the king and the *lama* decided to invite Guru Rinpoche to Tibet. He was able to dispel the spirits and the construction of the monastery was completed in 779 AD.

While Guru Rinpoche was in Tibet he called many of his fellow Indian Buddhist teachers to join him. They taught the Sanskrit language of the Buddhist scriptures to the Tibetans. In this way Vajrayana Buddhism spread to all of Tibet.

The grandson of King Trisong Detsan, King Lang Dharma, or 'The King without Dharma' tried to end Buddhism in Tibet. Eventually, a powerful monk named Palgyi Dorje caused the demise of King Lang Dharma. However, for two hundred years, practitioners of Buddhism were persecuted in Tibet. Buddhism was replaced by practices of magic and superstition, mixed with what was remembered of the teachings of Guru Rinpoche.

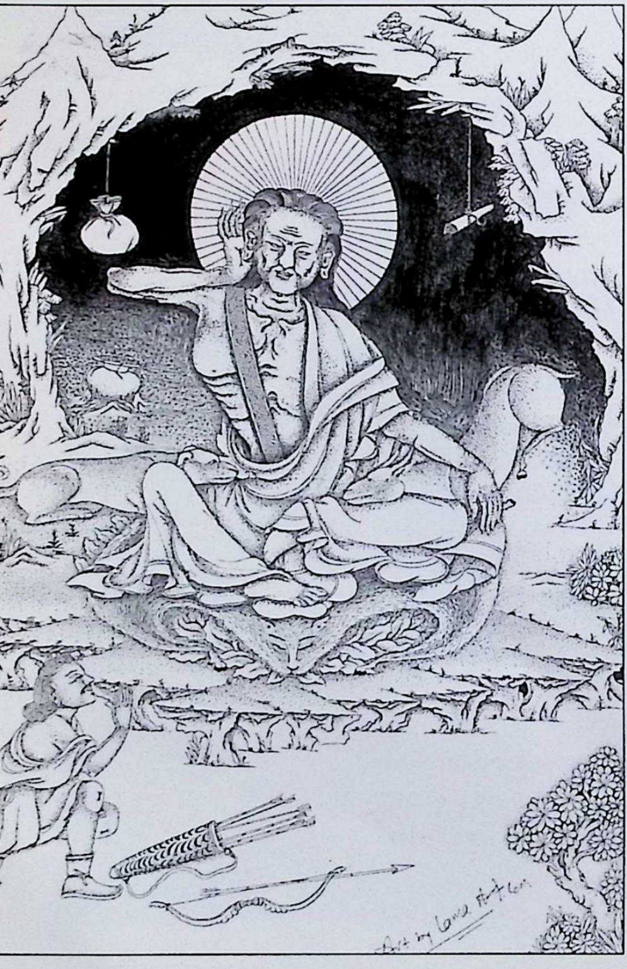
It was not until 1042 that the famous teacher Atisha and other learned monks from India started the resurgence of Buddhism in Tibet.

The First Buddhist in Manang

The first practitioner of Buddhism to come to Manang was Milarepa, the famous sage, poet, mystic, and Buddhist teacher. He lived in a cave in Manang over 960 years ago to meditate and teach. He only wore a cotton robe and so we call him Milerepa or 'cotton-clad Repa'.

Most images of Milerapa show him smiling and, holding his hand to his ear as he sings. He may also have green skin because he ate only nettles for many years.

Milarepa was born in 1040 to an affluent family in a place in Tibet called Kyanga Tsa. When Milarepa was still a youth, his dying father gave authority over the family property to his brother, Milarepa's uncle. The uncle squandered all the wealth on himself and turned his back on Milarepa and his mother. Faced with this hardship, Milarepa's mother encouraged Milarepa to learn black magic to poison his uncle.



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In a place called Ku Lung, Milarepa first used his magic to cause death, killing his uncle. His powers surprised him. His inner sense of guilt and the wrath of his teacher caused him to renounce black magic and seek mystic truth. He retreated to a cave where, after six years of meditation, he acquired the power to change his body into different shapes and fly across the sky like a bird. More importantly, he achieved mastery over his own self. He attained the supreme enlightenment of Buddhahood in the course of only one lifetime, something that has never been replicated.

Once when Milarepa was meditating near Mount Kailash in Tibet, he dreamt that Khyira Fho Dorje would become one of his disciples. Khyira Fho Dorje was a hunter living in upper Manang who was renowned for his skills at hunting sheep, deer, and musk deer with the help of his devoted dog.

Milarepa came to upper Manang, near Braga, to meditate in Shyakung Cave near the forest where Khyira Fho Dorje hunted. He wished to help free the dog and the hunter from their sinful ways.

Milarepa meditated in the cave and eventually met and converted the hunter and dog to the Buddha Dharma. (The whole story of Milarepa and the hunter is told in Chapter 5.)

The Start of Buddhism in Manang

In the time, when our ancestors began to settle in Manang, from the 1200s onwards, there were two kinds of dharma in Tibet - Buddha Dharma and Bon Dharma. Bon was practiced in Tibet before Buddhism came from India and China. After years of religious argument and disagreement between Buddhists and Bon practitioners, the King of Tibet decided to have an election. Tibet would follow whichever Dharma won and the followers of the defeated would have to leave Tibet.

The people worshiping Buddha Dharma won the election, and some followers of the Bon Dharma left Tibet and came to settle here in Manang.

It was not until a famous *lama* named Khyedu Karma Lopsang came to Manang that we changed and began to practice Buddha *Dharma*. Lama Lopsang brought Kargyupa Buddhism and converted many Bonpo areas to Buddhism. Through the help of his disciple, the middle son of the fifth Ghale Raja, the Ghale kings adopted Buddhism, which spread throughout Manang.

The Kargyupa sect is a form of Mahayana Buddhism.

Buddhism in Manang continued to evolve through the years as teachings and information was brought by travelers from Tibet and other neighbouring areas. Today each village *gompa* has a Buddhist spiritual leader.

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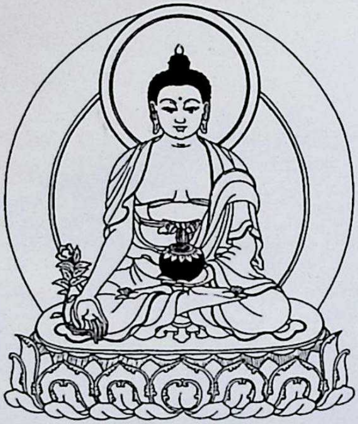
Traditional Buddhist Text

Important Buddhist Individuals and Deities

Buddhas – The Enlightened Beings

A **Buddha** is an enlightened being, who understands the true nature of reality — ultimate emptiness and relative interconnectedness. A Buddha has *khyenpa* or *bidwaan* (wisdom), *tsewa* or *karuna* (compassion), and *nupa* or *shakti* (spiritual power) to help enlighten and liberate all animate beings. *Maha-karuna,* or a state of complete compassion, is the most essential of these qualities. There are many depictions of past, present, and future Buddhas and their characteristics.



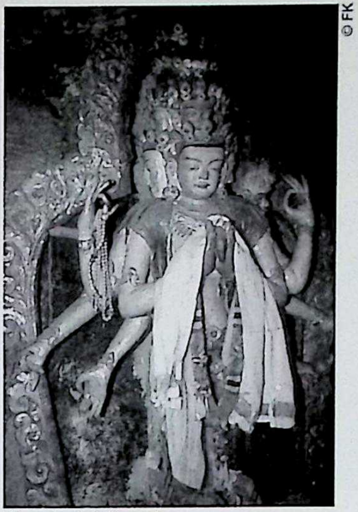
The most famous Buddha is **Shakyamuni Buddha**, the 'historical Buddha' of our present era. In the 5th century BC, the Shakyamuni Buddha was born in what is now southern Nepal. Shortly after his birth, his mother died, so his royal father kept him sheltered from any form of human suffering. In his late twenties, Shakyamuni renounced his succession to the throne and travelled throughout India, attaining enlightenment under a peepul tree in Boudhgaya. His teachings are the foundation of the Buddhist faith. Shakyamuni Buddha is often depicted sitting on a throne of lotus flowers.

Amitabha Buddha, also known as Opame, the Buddha of Infinite Light, is red in colour with his hands in the meditation gesture holding a begging bowl.

Maitreya Buddha, also known as Jampa, the Future Buddha, exists as a Bodhisattva until he can return as a simple human and become a Buddha, 4,000 years after the death of Shakyamuni Buddha. He may be shown sitting western-style with his feet on the floor.

Bodhisattvas – On the Path to Enlightenment

A **Bodhisattva** may be one of three kinds of beings or depictions. The first is a being who through compassion strives to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings, and has attained one of the levels of realization on the path to becoming a Buddha.



Eleven-headed Chenrezig

> The second kind is a being who has reached a state of enlightenment and can enter Nirvana, but chooses to remain in the cycle of reincarnation in order to assist and inspire others to attain enlightenment. Many reincarnate lamas are believed to be this kind of Bodhisattva.
>
> The third kind of Bodhisattva depicts a particular quality of enlightenment, such as compassion, wisdom, or spiritual power, in order to inspire that quality in others. There are many of these Bodhisattvas.

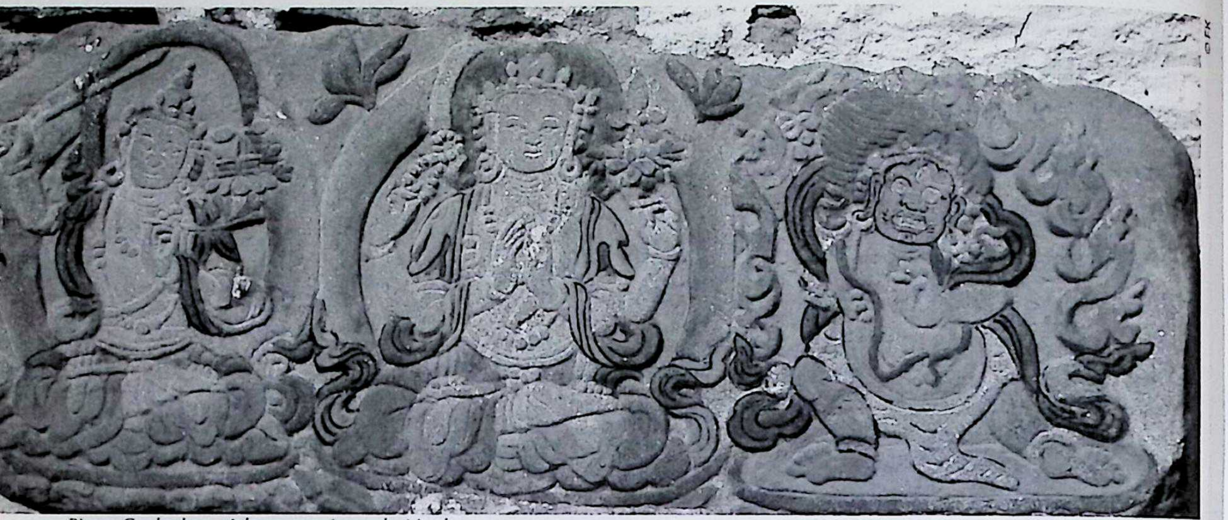
The Bodhisattva personifying compassion is **Chenrezig**, also known as Avalokiteshvara. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is regarded as an incarnation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Chenrezig is usually shown as a white being sitting on a lotus blossom throne with a deerskin draped over the left shoulder and holding a *mala* (string of prayer beads), a flower, and a gemstone. In another portrayal, he has eleven heads and one thousand arms. Some say his head and body exploded when confronted with so many problems to solve in the world. It was reassembled by Amitabha Buddha, who resides at the top of his new form as the eleventh head.

The Bodhisattva of wisdom, **Manjushri** or Jampelyang, is regarded as the first divine teacher of Buddhist principles.

Tara, or Dolma, is a Bodhisattva who symbolises purity and fertility and protects the people of Tibet. In her twenty-one manifestations, she was born from a tear of compassion that fell from Avalokiteshvara's eyes. She is thus the female version of Avalokiteshvara, and has the power to grant wishes.

The Bodhisattva of spiritual power, **Vajrapani**, or Chana Dorje, holds a *dorje* (thunderbolt) in his right hand. He is dark blue with a tiger skin around his waist and a snake around his neck. He also has a peaceful, standing aspect.

Rigsum Gombo is a depiction common on *mani* stones and in paintings in Manang. It shows the combination of Chenrezig, showing compassion, Jampelyang, showing wisdom, and Chana Dorje, showing spiritual power.



Rigsum Gombo shows wisdom, compassion, and spiritual power

Guardian Deities – Ancient Protectors of Buddhism

Guardian deities are protectors of the Buddha Dharma and painted at the entrances of gompas and religious sites. The four **Lokpalas** or Chokyong represent the compass directions. The eastern deity is white playing a lute, the southern blue holding a sword, and the western red holding a dorje. **Vaishravana,** the deity of the north, is also the God of Wealth and can be seen riding a snow lion and holding a banner of victory and a jewel-spitting mongoose.

Mahakala, also known as Nagpo Chenpo, is a wrathful, protective deity with connections to the Hindu deity Shiva. Mahakala has from two to six arms, is blue with fanged teeth, and wears a tiara of skulls.

The 'horse-necked' wrathful manifestation of Avalokiteshvara is **Hayagriva,** or Tamdrin. He has a red body, a horse's head, and wears a tiara of skulls, a necklace of severed heads, and a tiger skin around his waist. He holds a skull cup, a lotus, a sword, a snare, an axe, and a club, and stands on a sun disc trampling corpses.

Modern Spiritual Leaders of Manang

Two Buddhist teachers have helped to advance and spread Buddhism among the people of Manang in the last century.

Lama Gyalbo

In the 1900s, **Lama Kusho Wangyal Rinpoche,** from Nubri in northern Gorkha district, came to Manang. During his visit, he noticed a young man, Lama Gyalbo, who had a keen interest in the Buddhist teachings. After observing his innate qualities, Lama Kusho Wangyal Rinpoche predicted that the young Lama Gyalbo would become a great spiritual master and benefit many people in Manang.

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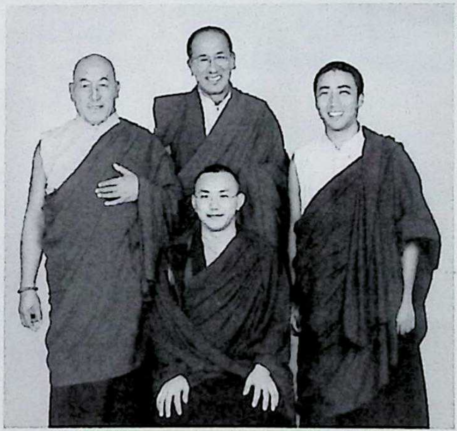
Lama Gyalbo

Lama Gyalbo was determined to pursue this prediction and his Buddhist studies. He went to Nubri with Lama Kusho Wangyal Rinpoche. Under the Rinpoche's spiritual guidance, Lama Gyalbo mastered all the *shastra* (theoretical) and *tantra* (practical) teachings, particularly of the Dzogchen Nyingthik tradition, the teachings of Guru Rinpoche.

Several years later, Lama Gyalbo returned to his village in Manang and became immensely popular, with many followers from all the villages. His powers to bring rain, end hailstorms, and decrease snowfall were impressive and helped immensely during our farming season. He established a monastery in Ngawal called Karma Samten Ling, where he guided many young disciples to a level of self-realization. There he taught us a more complete sense of Buddha Dharma.

Lama Gyalbo also guided us in preserving nature and saving many animals from hunting. He is renowned in and around Manang to this day. Since he passed away in 1976, we remember him as a great spiritual master, guide, and highly respected member of our greater Manang community.

During his cremation, many people saw auspicious signs, which we interpreted to mean that he would return. Four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Lama Gyalbo's Reincarnate (centre) and grandson (right) years later, he was reborn in the small village of Chumje in Gorkha District. The great Tai Situ Rinpoche recognized him as Lama Gyalbo's reincarnation. He was enthroned with a new name, Karma Lungtok Tenpe Nyima.

In recognition of Lama Gyalbo's work and dedication to advancing the Buddha Dharma, the government of Nepal in 1998 appointed Karma Lungtok Tenpe Nyima as the Chairman of the Monasteries Management Committee of Nepal, under the Ministry of Local Development.

Karma Lungtok Tenpe Nyima now resides in the Karma Lekshey Ling Institute, a monastery and school for Buddhist training in Swayambunath, Kathmandu. He supports and guides about 200 monks with the assistance of Lama Gyaltsen and Khenpo Kunga Tsering Ghale.

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Lama Sherup Gyaltsen

Another of our spiritual leaders is Lama Sherup Gyaltsen. Also known as Lama Norbu Tsering, he was born in Manang village in 1950. At the age of eight, he began studying Buddhism at home. At fifteen, he had developed such a keen interest in the *dharma* that he went for further studies to Rumtek Shedup Chokhorling monastery in Sikkim. The *guru* at this monastery was the revered Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa.

Lama Norbu Tsering remained in Sikkim for eighteen years. He took monk's vows from His Holiness the Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa. When he was 33, we of the greater society of Manang invited him to be our Society Guru and the Karmapa granted him permission to return to Nepal.

For seven years, he resided at the Pokhara Gompa, Karma Dhubgyu Chokhorling. We then invited him to move to Kathmandu and take up residence at the Manang Gompa. We thought he could benefit more people, from both Manang and elsewhere, if he was located in the more accessible city. Since 1984, Lama Norbu Tsering has been living in Kathmandu. He has also traveled widely teaching Buddha Dharma, especially in Thailand and Malaysia.

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Lama Phuntsok

Choje Lama Phuntsok was born in Manang in 1951. He first studied with his father, who was a village lama, but has progressed to a very distinguished level in the Kagypa sect.

Lama Phuntsok became a monk at the age of twelve and began his general studies. At the age of 19, he took vows and initiations from the sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, the head of the Kagypa sect. Since then, he has received many initiations and transmissions from reincarnate lamas and teachers. He has also studied the various sciences and treatises and learned how to create images to represent the Buddha's body, calligraphy to present his speech, and stupas to represent his mind.

At 32, he learned the initiations, reading transmissions, explanations, methods of meditation, and oral instructions for the practices so that he could blend these with his mind. Lama Phuntsok then entered three-year retreat to mature these teachings and to examine their commentaries.

In 1990, according to the suggestion of Khyabje Jamgon Kongtrul Chokyi Senge Rinpoche, he founded the Karma Lekshay Ling school as a place of study and practice. In 2002, Karma Lekshay Ling's monastery for ritual practice and the institute for higher Buddhist studies were separated. The institute has about seventy students and there are plans to expand this number.

The seventeenth Karmapa, Ogyen Drodul Trinley Wangi Dorje, has written:

> Lama Phuntsok is an individual who has worked for the Dharma with a very sincere intention and several with his best efforts, all of which have created many positive results. I rejoice in all his activity and with this letter confer on him the position of Choje Lama within the Kagyu hierarchy. His sincere intention to benefit the Dharma is most excellent. As he has before, Choje Lama Phuntsok Rinpoche maintains his commitment to fully develop our teachings and continues his tremendous endeavors in that direction.

Symbols and Objects in our Religion

> "To do dharma, one should do it with your actions, words, and mind. The more you do it with prayers and mani wheels, the more dharma one does."
>
> Lama Karma Tsering of Braga Gompa

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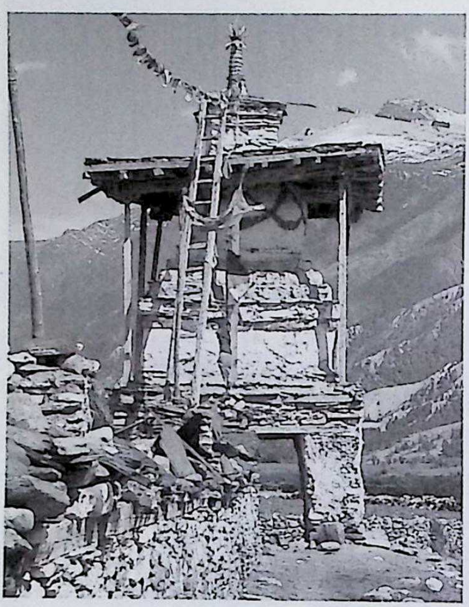

Objects in Villages and Along Trails

In Manang, the importance of Buddhist practices in the lives of people shows in the *stupas, mani* walls, and prayer wheels on the village trails or to guard the entrance gates of the villages. It is important to pass any religious object with your right hand towards it.

Mani walls are piles of stones heaped like jewels in the center of trails, paths, mountain passes, and at the entrances and exits of villages.

We often carve prayers onto stones. The most common one is *Om Mani Padme Hum,* which affirms the compassionate presence of Chenrezig.

Chorten is the Tibetan word for the Sanskrit *stupa,* a monument built to commemorate and enshrine the relics of a deceased being, especially one who attained a stage of enlightenment. Depending on the purpose of the *chorten*, a *lama* places various precious objects, such as turquoise, coral, silver, gold, brass, rice, wheat, mantras, prayer flags, and *thog-shing* (a kind of special wood) inside the *chorten*. Sometimes a juniper tree is planted in the centre of a *chorten* in the name of a dead person, and the growth of the tree is symbolic of the state of the soul after death.

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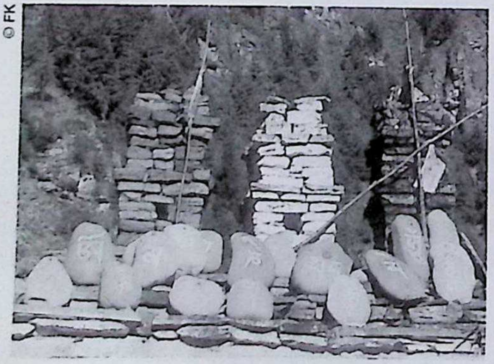

Chortens are often painted with stripes of three colours. The colour white represents Chenrezig, the deity of compassion; yellow represents Jampelyang, the deity of wisdom; and blue, Chana Dorje, the deity of strength.

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We believe that it is important to combine compassion, wisdom, and spiritual power, so we often build the three chortens together.

Prayer flags are squares of coloured cloth printed with Buddhist prayers. We string them up at the tops of passes, streams, across rivers, and atop houses. When the flags flutter, prayers and good intentions are released to the heavens. The colors symbolize the elements water - blue, metal - white, fire - red, wood - green, and earth - yellow.

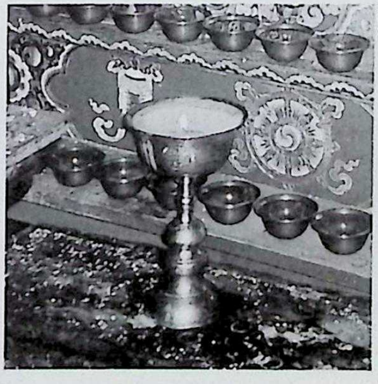
We Manangpas use many different kinds of **prayer wheels**, which may be turned by hand, wind, water, or the heat of a butter lamp. We fill prayer wheels with sheets of paper printed with prayers that are 'recited' with each clockwise revolution of the wheel.

© FK

Pilgrimage routes are lined with prayer wheels, some made from elaborately carved and decorated woods and metals, some simply painted milk tins.

Ritual Objects

In Manang, we often make offerings to the deities in **seven bowls** filled with **clean water**. Each bowl has a unique symbolism, including *shyalchep,* which signifies *torma* (a ritual object modeled from butter and flour), *dhunum* for food grains, *chomey* for butter lamps, *dhupai* for incense, *mindo* for flowers, *thichhu* for water, and *shyapsil* for purification of lakes. Bowls are made from various materials – glass, wood, silver, or gold.



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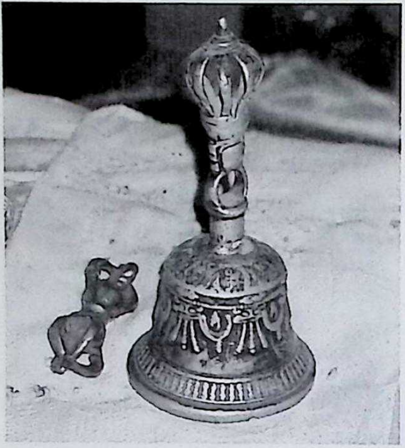
We call butter lamps **chomey**. They are a sacred light fed with *ghee*, or clarified butter. People offer butter lamps to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, or deities. We believe that lighting butter lamps helps us to see more clearly in this life as well as in the next and that the light helps to dispel obstacles.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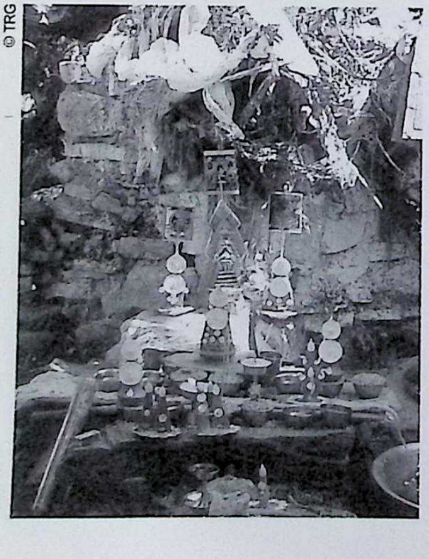
The **dorje**, or *vajra*, is a thunderbolt or diamond that destroys all kinds of ignorance, and is indestructible. It symbolizes the power of universal compassion, unbreakable as a diamond and as powerful as a thunderbolt. In rituals, the *dorje* symbolizes the male principle, and is held on the right hand.

The **Trilbu** or bell symbolizes the female principle and is held in the left hand. The bell stands for *prajna*, or the ultimate wisdom that is the source of universal compassion. The interaction of the *dorje* and the bell, or the combination of the male and female elements, leads to enlightenment. They complement one another and are often used together.

In Manang, the elderly people especially spend much of their time using a set of prayer beads, called a mala, to keep track of their mantras or other Buddhist practices. A *mala* has 108 beads made from seeds, wood, bone, or precious stones. The number 108 has great symbolic significance for us and there are many references to 108 in Buddhism.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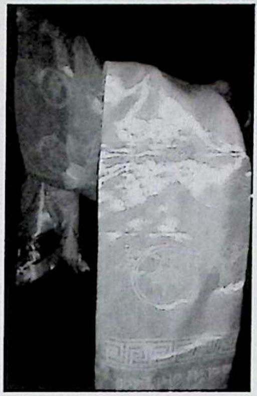
Buddhist prayer books, called **Pecha**, are sacred because they contain the words of the Buddhist teachers and teachings. For this reason, we handle the Pecha with great reverence and never let them touch the ground.

Torma is used in special rituals. We make *torma* out of *tsampa* (roasted barley flour), milk, sugar, and butter. Torma means *ghaling,* or a mountain of food, fruit, and flowers collected for offering to the deities. Our ancestors say that the tradition of *ghaling* began in India where fruit and flowers are plentiful. Here in Manang and in Tibet we do not have fruit and other food to offer to the deities, so we began offering *torma* made from locally available foods instead. We shape torma as a mountain and colour it either white or red. Then, we make flowers shaped out of butter. These represent the flowers offered to the deities. The red *torma* is called *marto,* while the white *torma* is called *karto.*



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The color red comes from a wild plant called *koma* found in the forest of Manang. Red *torma* represent an offering of meat and alcohol, whereas the white *torma* is like an offering of milk, fruit, or other vegetarian food items. *Torma* are made according to three levels. The first represents a deity described in a prayer book. The second level is an offering, and third level is for devils.

A **khata** is a ceremonial scarf, usually made of white cotton or silk, which is offered to a lama at the beginning or end of most Tibetan rituals. It is also presented to a person during life's special occasions, as they make important departures, and as a token of appreciation.

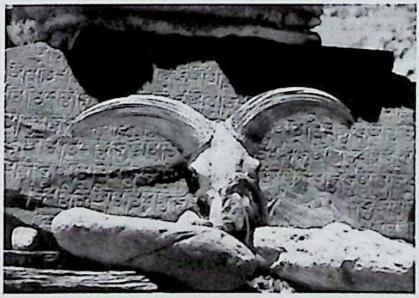
Natural Objects

For us in Manang, the **juniper** shrub has great religious significance. Its smell has the power to avert evil, so we often dry juniper branches and burn them as incense in our homes, along trails, and in *gompas* during prayers. We plant juniper saplings in the middle of our fields to protect our crops from disease.

Lhu is the energy and spirit of the springs and water sources. We protect Lhu by placing juniper trees at the sources of water. We say in Manang that if the water source becomes dirty, Lhu becomes unhappy and the spring will not give water. So, we always keep the areas around water clean. On some occasions, we light incense sticks and offer rice and milk to Lhu.

Skull

Sometimes, we place on mani walls the skulls of our animals that have served us well. They might have carried our loads, given us milk, or been butchered for meat. We place their skull on the mani wall as a prayer for their future lives.



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Mantras

Mantras are sacred syllables that evoke a state of being or insight. They are often very old and contain both literal and non-literal sounds and meanings that evoke feelings and visions.

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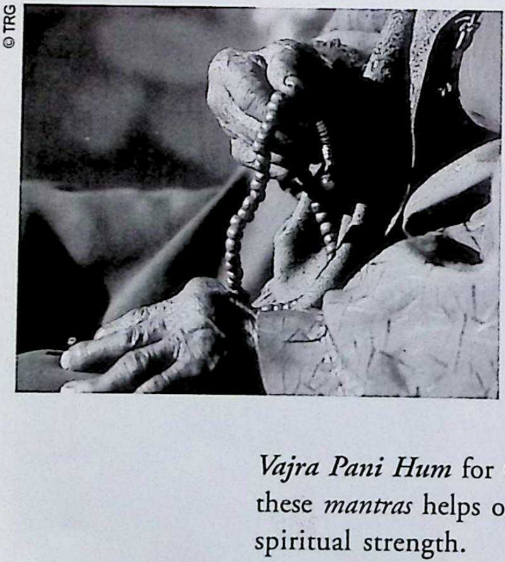
The most popular mantra in Buddhism is *Om Mani Padme Hum.* This six-syllable invocation means 'hail the jewel in the lotus.' It invokes the deity of compassion, Chenrezig, as the saviour and protector from danger. Throughout Manang, *Om Mani Padme Hum* is seen on rocks, prayer wheels, chorten walls, and loose stones heaped on the trails.

The six syllables of the mantra are *Om,* for giving, *Ma,* for mortality, *Ni* for patience, *Pad* for endurance, *Ma* for concentration, and *Hum* for wisdom. Mani Dhunghuree is when you recant the prayer one hundred thousand times.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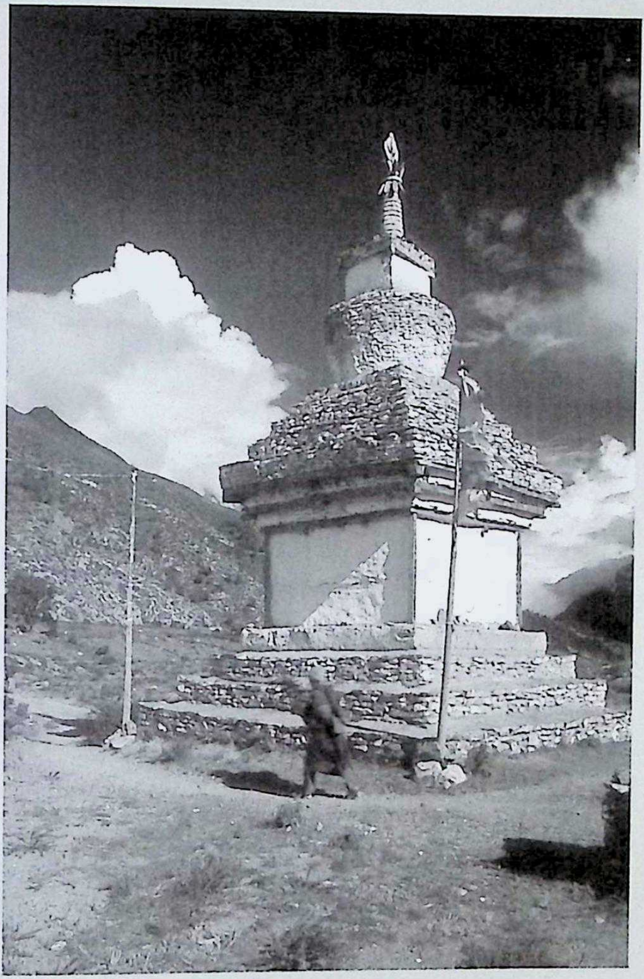
When we conduct Mani Dhunghuree, monks, nuns, and villagers gather at the *gompas* and chant the *mantra*. Lama Norbu Tsering, the Lama of Upper Manang, often leads the chanting and has been conducting Mani Dhunghuree for the last twenty-one years. The prayer begins in the early morning and usually last until late afternoon, for twenty-one days. The sponsors, called Nandhi, finance the cost of the prayer and provide everybody at the *gompa* with drinks and snacks.

Other common mantras are *Om Ah Ra Pa Cha Na Di* for Jampelyang, the deity of wisdom, and *Om Vajra Pani Hum* for Chana Dorje, the deity of spiritual power. Chanting these *mantras* helps one to become compassionate, and gain wisdom and spiritual strength.



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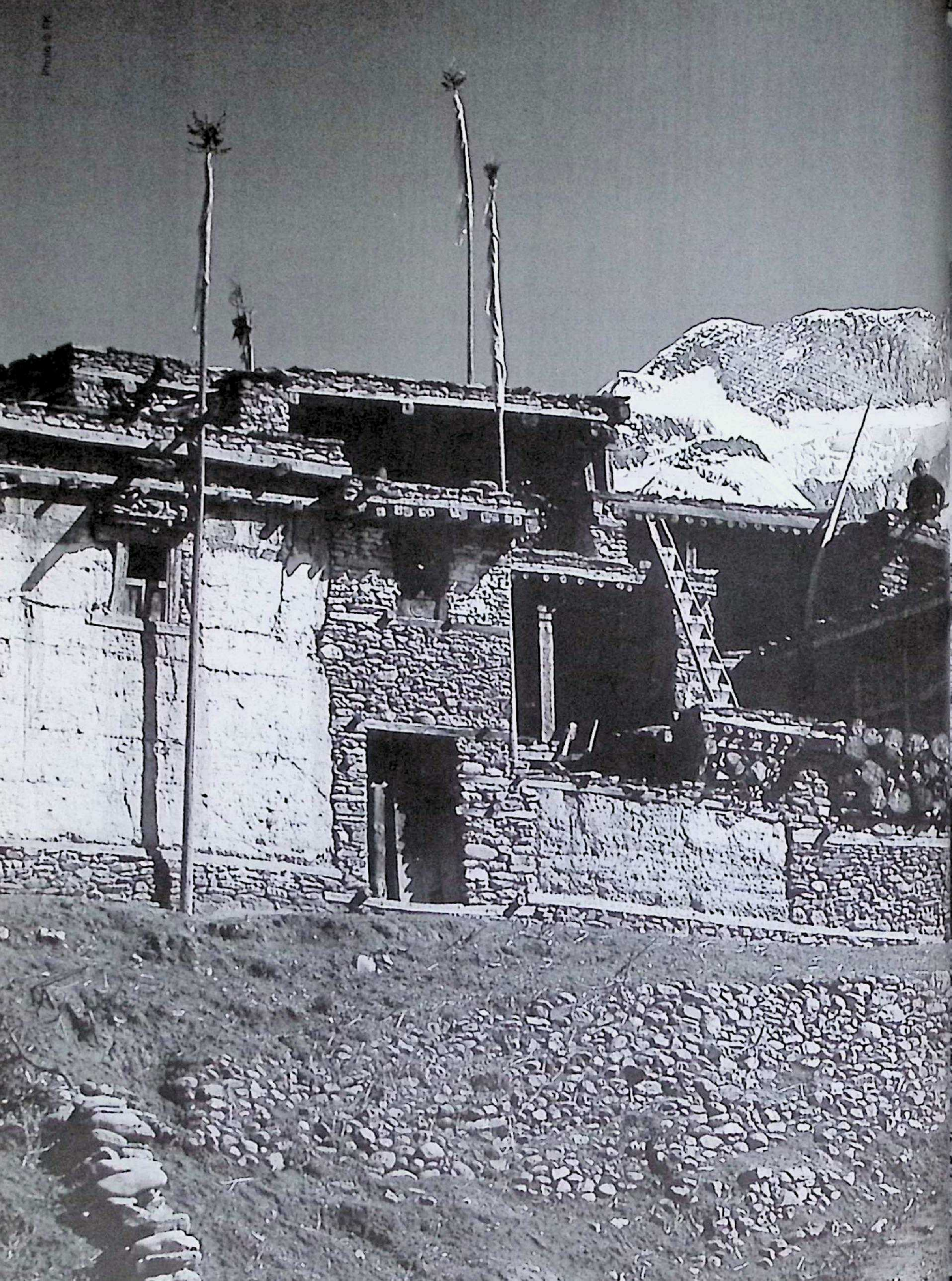
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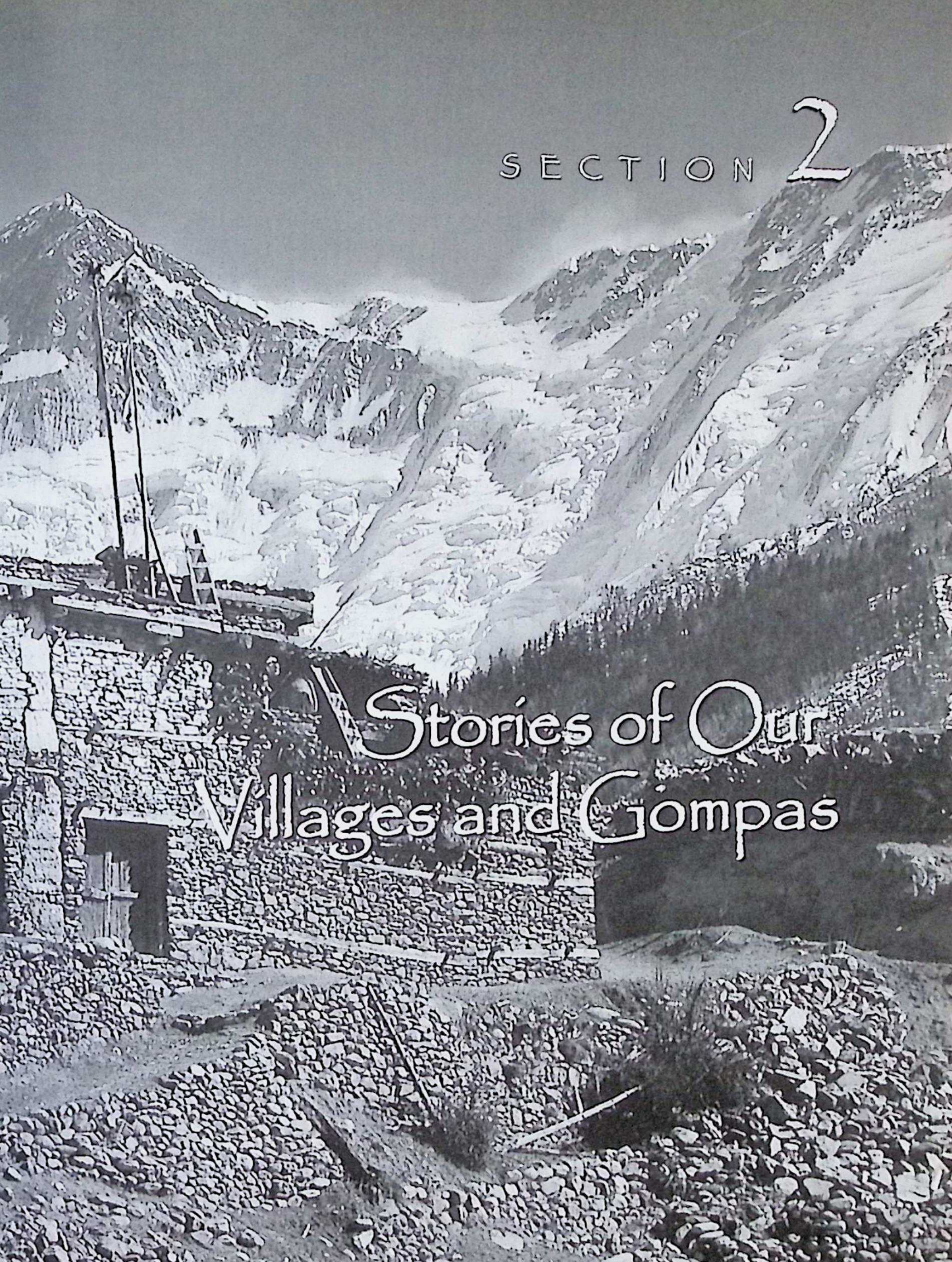

SECTION 2

Stories of Our Villages and Gompas

> "What seems important in these (oral) traditions is not so much the actual historical event to which they refer, but that they (explain) one relationship or another..."
>
> (van Spengen 1987).

> When our ancestors first settled in Manang, there were very few people living in the valley. Most places and features, such as lakes, rivers, mountains, caves and valleys, were unnamed. As we established ourselves, we began to assign them names, often choosing ones matching the surrounding geography, or having historical or cultural significance, so travelers could easily recognize them.
>
> Many of our village names also link closely with our legends, myths, religious practices, and festivals, dating back centuries into our distant past. The village names tell us about our ancestors who settled here and what was important to them.

The stories of Manang are grouped according to the three regions: Gyasumdo, or lower Manang; Nyeshang, or upper Manang; and Nar, the most remote region in the district.

The first three villages established in upper Manang were Braga, Ngawal and Ghyaru (previously one village split into two after a feud), and Manang Village (Village). The Kings of Manang, the Ghale Rajas, settled in Ngawal and built the three most significant *gompas* in Manang Village, Braga, and Nar Village.

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CHAPTER

Stories of Gyasumdo, Lower Manang

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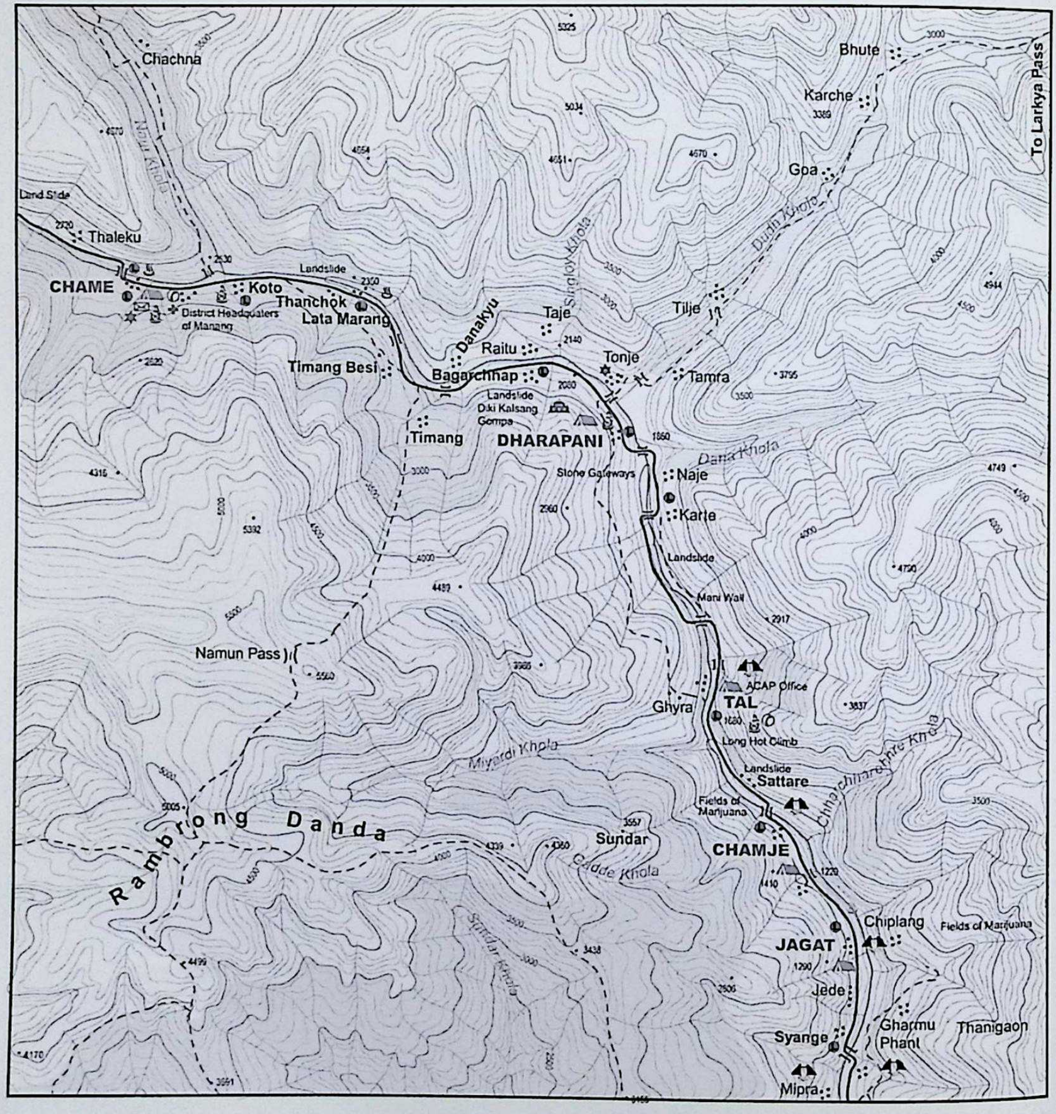
Stories of Gyasumdo, Lower Manang


Chachna
Nar Khola
Land Slide
2720
Thaleku
CHAME
2630
Koto
Landslide
2350
Thanchok
District Headquaters of Manang
Lata Marang
2620
Danakyu
Timang Besi
Bagarchhap
Raitu
Taje
2140
Sirdjoy Khola
Tonje
Tamra
Tilje
Dudh Khola
Goa
Karche
3389
Bhute
3000
To Larkya Pass
5325
5034
4054
4651
4670
4570
3795
3500
4944
4749
2080
Landslide
Diki Kalsang Gompa
Timang
DHARAPANI
1860
Dana Khola
Stone Gateways
Naje
Karte
4316
5332
2960
Landslide
4480
4000
4790
Mani Wall
2917
Namun Pass
5560
3985
ACAP Office
TAL
Ghyra
1680
Long Hot Climb
3837
Miyardi Khola
Landslide
Sattare
Fields of Marijuana
Chhachharenre Khola
3500
5005
Rambrong Danda
3557
Sundar
4339
4360
Gadde Khola
CHAMJE
1410
1220
Sundar Khola
Chiplang
Fields of Marijuana
JAGAT
1290
3438
4499
2506
Jede
Gharmu Phant
Thanigaon
Syange
Mipra
4170
3091

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Gyasumdo means the 'meeting place of the three trails' coming from Lamjung District (south), upper Manang (northwest), and Tibet (north to northeast). We call the people from Gyasumdo *Gyasumdo-ten*, or people who 'sit in Gyasumdo'. Gyasumdo does not actually begin from the border with Lamjung, but from the village of Thonje.

The village of **Tal** marks the border between Lamjung and Manang Districts. It is actually just below the lower end of Gyasumdo. Tal is a new village in the Marsyangdi River Gorge, inhabited since the 1970s. The flat valley of Tal sits in an otherwise narrow and precipitous canyon created only a few hundred years ago when a gigantic landslide blocked the Marsyangdi Khola with huge bounders. The landslide blocked the river forming a lake.

Tal means 'lake' in Nepali. Eventually the lake filled in with debris from the mountains forming the flat valley, through which the Marsyangdi Khola meanders for several kilometres. A scar on the hillside shows the location of where the slide came down at the southeast end of the valley. Travelling north the trail ascends from Chamje through Sattale, and then climbs over the boulders at the base of the slide and into Tal.

> We Gurungs believe the mountains on either side of the canyon are sacred, inhabited by deities. We call the one to the east Akhay Kai Du, meaning 'old grandfather rock'. If you look up just before you enter the canyon you can see Akhay Kai Du projecting from the cliff like a *torma,* a flour and butter symbol used in Buddhist ritual. The one on the west side we call Pakre, which is another name for the eastern end of the Lamjung *Himal* range.
>
> Many years ago, these two deities became angry at each other and began to fight, throwing boulders across the canyon. Pakre won, which caused the mountain to fall down from Akhay Kai Du's side, damming the Marsyangdi Khola. Eventually, they made up and took *mit*, (a bond of brotherhood). If you look, you can see Akhay Kai Du is leaning slightly towards Pakre, in submission.

Cascading down from a cliff top just past Tal is one of the only approachable waterfalls along the Marsyangdi Khola trail into Manang. The name of the waterfall, *Tal Chaharo*, means the 'waterfall of Tal'. Legend says that in days long past, you could hear the sound of a Gurung *Shaman* (spirit medium) beating his drum from within the waterfall. In recent years, local Buddhist Lamas have built a small stone monument, a *chorten,* on the mound in front of the waterfall. This chorten is a request to the gods not to send any more landslides.

Karte is a tiny settlement of a few houses and fields on the trail beyond Tal. Local people say Karte means a place of 'many big boulders'. Like at Tal, there was once a landslide here.

Thonje and **Dharapani** are two villages on either side of the upper end of the Marsyangdi Khola Gorge, marking the entrance to Gyasumdo. Until a few years ago, Dharapani, which means 'tap water', was nothing more than a tea stop. It became a more prominent settlement after the widening of the main trail up from Lamjung District made passage of pack animals safe in the 1970s. Before that, traders entered Manang District through a high pass on the eastern end of Lamjung Himal, high above the Marsyangdi Khola Gorge.

Thonje is across the river from the main trail and means 'a field full of pine trees', which it was until recently when many of them were cut down. Thonje is one of several prominent villages, populated by ethnic Gurungs, Manangpas using the surname Gurung, Lama Tibetans , and a mix of other ethnic groups. At the entrance and exit to Thonje are the first village *chortens,* showing the increasing presence of Tibetan Buddhism as one travels north. Thonje was the district headquarters before it was relocated to Chame.

Until the Chinese closed the Tibetan border in 1959, Thonje was the starting point on a trade route to Tibet across the Larkya-La Pass and Gya-La Pass, and south into the lower hills of Nepal over the pass known, in Nepal, as Namun Bhyangjang. Prior to the 1970s, traders traveled through the Marsyangdi Gorge only when winter snows blocked these higher passes, because the trail in the gorge was too narrow and dangerous. Today, in the winter months, a few Tibetans from Larkya La still come to Thonje and camp in tents, while trading, working as labourers, and offering religious services.

In Thonje, the people practise both Buddhist and Hindu Dharmas. There is a small *gompa* in the centre of the village and, at the confluence of the Marsyangdi Khola and the *Dudh* (Milky) Khola, a Hindu religious shrine. Man Lal Gurung, a *subba* (tax collector or chief) from Lamjung District, built both the *gompa* and the shrine during the height of the salt trade in the early 1900s.

The Salt Trade

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, until the Chinese invaded Tibet and the border with Nepal closed (1950s), a salt trade flourished between the salt lakes of Western Tibet and the rice-growing regions of the middle Himalaya. Traders traveled up the Marsyangdi Khola and neighboring Kali Gandaki Khola (Mustang District), leading to the rise of the *subbas* who controlled the trade on commission under the rule of the Ranas in Kathmandu. Strong competition existed between the Thakali and Gurung subbas controlling the two routes.

During the height of the salt trade, Thonje was an important settlement for it served as the winter residence of the subba and a convenient storage location. Most of the rice traders traveling north veered off the Manang trail and up the Dudh Khola from Thonje, through the villages of Tilje, Karche, and Bhute, to the valley of Bimthang. Salt traders had semi-permanent summer camps in Bimthang Valley, and this is where bartering actually took place. Salt traders from Tibet traveled over the Larkya-La Pass and into this broad, flat valley, unloading and pasturing their yaks here. Nepali traders carrying rice and other grains up the Marsyangdi Khola or over the high mountain passes of Lamjung Himal met them here.

A small part of the trade also passed west, upriver to upper Manang. During the time of King Nirendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev (before the Rana rulers of Nepal) the people of upper Manang were granted trading facilities between Nepal and Tibet over the difficult Lugu-La Pass. They traded chillies from Gorkha District for salt from Tibet.

In the middle of the 1800s an ambitious Gurung of the Lamechhane ethnic family moved down from the high ridge top village of Ghan Pokhara, in northern Lamjung District, to settle the rich farmlands of Rople Phant near the Marsyangdi Khola trail to Manang. This old man was unlucky for he had no sons to succeed him. At the age of sixty, he and his wife visited a nearby fertility temple and only after that did his wife give birth to a son. This son was Man Lal Gurung.

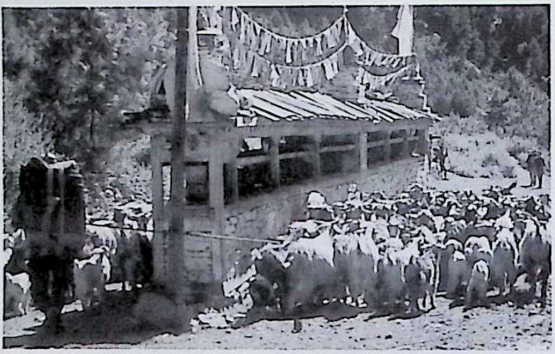
As Man Lal grew up, the Rana government gained power in Nepal and appointed some Thakalis from the Kali Gandaki Khola in Mustang District to manage the Marsyangdi Khola tax collection and salt trade. The ethnic Gurungs resented the presence of the Thakalis.

When Man Lal became of age he traveled up the Marsyangdi Khola to the village of Tilje to seek a bride among the ethnic Ghale Gurungs settled there. On the return, when Man Lal and his new bride passed through Jagat (the location of the tax office), they were stopped by the Thakalis and forced to pay a percentage of the dowry as tax. This angered Man Lal and he vowed to one day take over control of the tax collection himself and manage the trade route. Being from Lamjung on the lower end of the route, and having just made a marriage alliance with a prominent family in Manang, Man Lal already had the key to his success.

True to his word, Man Lal became tax collector, local magistrate, and a leading merchant of the salt trade after cleverly outbidding the Thakalis to win the favor of the Ranas far away in Kathmandu. The Ranas depended on revenues like these to maintain their sumptuous and expensive lifestyles. To improve his relations with the Thakalis he also married a second wife, a Thakali woman. One of his sons by the Thakali wife, Narjung, built the main Muktinath Temple in Mustang, at the upper end of Thak Khola.

The settlement of **Odargaon** means the 'village of the overhanging cliff shelter'. Most visitors to Manang do not go through this village, which is located high up on the mountain. Many of the residents of Odargaon have large herds of sheep and goats they graze in the high pastures during the summer months.

Bagarchhap is a small market town named after the sand and rubble deposits left by several floods over the last few centuries. In the early 1990s, a huge landslide destroyed much of Bagarchhap. Beside the trail, about halfway through the village, is a memorial to the many villagers and foreign trekkers who died in their sleep when the landslide came during the night. Bagarchhap has a relatively new *gompa* of the *Nyingmapa* sect of Tibetan Buddhism. This is one of the last villages in the gorge where the houses have sloped roofs. With the dry climate higher in the valley, most houses beyond have flat stone roofs.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Phuten is a large Gurung and Ghale village. Legends say there were once three brothers, one new settled in Phuten, one in Tal, and one in Syange.

Tapche, known as Tasa in the Gurung language, means 'a flat horse pasture'. *Ta* means 'horse' and *tathang* is a 'place for keeping horses'. It was also on the route of past ethnic Gurung migration through the mountains to the lower hills of Nepal. This small mostly ethnic Gurung village shared a marriage relationship with the village of Pisang further north.

The *Sukeko* (Dry) Khola marks the border between Pisang's traditional land and Tapche's traditional land. Between them is a place called *Kebatcho* meaning 'abduction plateau'. It was common at this location for men from Tapche to abduct girls from Pisang whom they wished to marry.

> Years ago a girl from Pisang was returning from Besisahar (Lamjung District) up the Marsyangdi Khola trail. A boy from Tapche wished to marry her so he kidnapped her when she reached the place called Kebatcho. After he brought the girl home and told his

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parents, they traveled to Pisang to visit her parents, taking with them lots of alcohol. The girls' parents wanted their daughter to marry a rich boy. To test this boy's wealth they told his parents that they would only give their daughter in marriage if the boy could place one gold coin at every step from his house to the place called *Muecho* (a high place of money). He did this and they married.

Danda Kyu is a newer settlement of only a few families of the Lama Tibetans ethnic family. It is located on the hillside and was originally a watering hole for muleteers to rest their pack animals. *Danda* in Nepali means 'hill' and *kyu* in Gurung means 'water'.

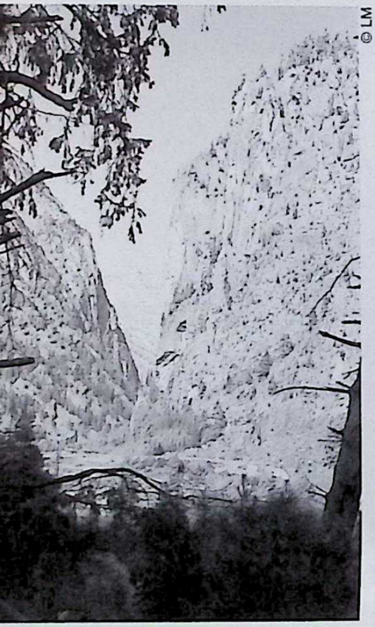
Chauri Kharka, also called Timang Besi, is another recent settlement of Lama Tibetans that began as a yak pasture. *Chauri* is a Nepali word meaning 'yak crossbreed with a cow' and *kharka* means 'a pasture', while *besi* means a 'place at the bottom of a hill'.

Lata Marang is a Lama Tibetan village meaning the fields of the 'deaf mute from Marang'. The first man to settle here was apparently *lato,* a deaf mute. There is a small hot springs here famous for healing those who suffer from arthritis.

Thanchok, also known as Tsouy in Gurung and Dzong Gyu in Tibetan, is a village off the main trail. Thanchok means the 'fortress village with a waterfall'. Residents of Thanchok are also highland shepherds.

Koto is another small village of Lama Tibetans. It is across from the confluence of the Nar Khola and the Marsyangdi Khola. Koto in the Gurung language means 'walnut' and there is a wild walnut grove on the cliff above the village. The route to the region of Nar begins across the river from Koto.

Further up off the trail is **Kyupar**, a tiny settlement meaning 'the place opposite the water' because it is across from where the Nar Khola joins the Marsyangdi Khola.



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Chame, originally Cheme, is today the District Headquarters of Manang. High cliffs surround Chame, so the sun only shines directly on the village for a few hours a day. Both winter and summer months are extremely cold. The name, therefore, means 'fields in the sunny corner of the cliff'. The people of Chame, called *Chame-ten*, are both recent Lama Tibetans migrants, established ethnic Gurungs, and Nepali civil servants.

The mountains shield areas north and northwest of Chame from the winds and rains of the monsoon, so Chame is the last place in the valley where rice is cultivated. From here on up the valley are oak forests, apple orchards, and crops of buckwheat, millet and barley.

Today there are three sections of Chame. The first, Chame proper, is located along the south bank of the Marsyangdi Khola. This is an older, residential part of the village. The second is Chame

Mathi, or 'upper' Chame, where the civil servants of the Nepali Government have built offices and living quarters. While these structures are new, this is the oldest part of Chame, originally called *Munda,* 'the place of the wood plank houses'. There are now over fifty buildings on this plateau above the main town.

The third part of the village is located across the river on the north bank under a towering cliff. This is the newest part of the village. It has become popular as a location for tourist hotels because it gets more sun than the rest of Chame. There is also a small *tato pani* (hot spring) here. People from upper Manang come to Chame to enjoy these hot mineral waters, which ease joint pain. The waters reputedly cure disease if you soak three times a day for a week. Above this area is a plateau with rich farmland for wheat and buckwheat. Beyond this, a pine forest and cliffs continue up towards the snowy peaks of Lamjung Himal.

In the 1960s, Khampa soldiers used to camp high above Chame, out of sight of the trail. Until 1973, areas upriver from Chame were restricted to travel by foreigners.

Khampa Soldiers from Tibet

In Tibet, the Khampas, from the district in Eastern Tibetan of Kham, were traditionally rough, tough, physically strong, and armed worriors. They became good fighters when the Tibetans took up arms against the invading Chinese in the late 1950s.

From the early 1960s until the mid 1970s, Tibetan Khampa fighters crossed the border into Manang and neighbouring districts, seeking refuge from the Chinese army. They established several military camps from where they staged raids back into Tibet against Chinese troops and army supply convoys. Several of these camps were located at Thonje, Thanchok, Chame, Brathang, and on the trail to Nar.

> The Khampas were very bossy and did not want to follow any of the customary rules of Manang. They would enter our houses uninvited and eat our food, steal our trade goods, take our horses, and mistreat our wives and sisters. We disliked the Khampas. They killed many yaks, *kasturis* (musk deer), *mrigas* (deer), and other respected animals.
>
> Dolpa *Tulku* (reincarnate *lama*) was from the upper Manang village of Braga. When he was young, he left to study at a *gompa* in neighbouring Dolpa District. In the late 1960s, he returned, bringing yaks, horses, and food for his family. On his way, Khampa soldiers beat him severely and stole his yaks and horses. When we heard of this, we were very upset.
>
> The heads of all the villages in upper Manang called a meeting. Together we wrote a letter of complaint to the *Dalai Lama* (leader of the Tibetan people), who was living in exile in Dharamsala, India. The Dalai Lama received the letter and sent an emissary to Manang District to warn the Khampas to improve their behaviour. However, they did not improve, so we decided the Khampas should pay a fine for all the horses, yaks, and other food they had stolen. When they laughed at us in disagreement, we decided to fight them.

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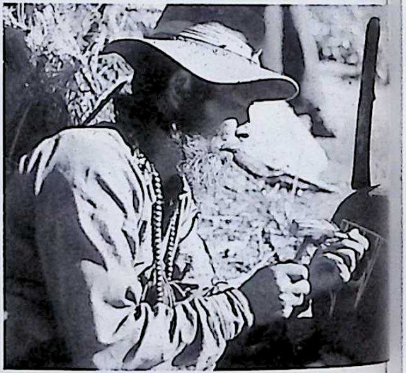
Akhay Jungme

The United States C.I.A. was secretly supporting the Khampas, supplying them with weaponry and training. We found it difficult to defend ourselves against their powerful firearms, so we appealed to the Nepali Government for help. The response was very slow. Some of us from upper Manang grew impatient and instead bought firearms from retired *lahures* (Nepali soldiers who had served in the British Ghurkha Army), Chinese, and Indians. Once when the C.I.A. dropped firearms for the Khampas, we took them for ourselves. We used these firearms to fight the Khampas and sometimes even to fight among ourselves.

In the mid 1970s, the U.S. C.I.A. stopped funding the Khampas and the Chinese increased pressure on the Government of Nepal to help close down the Khampa movement. Many Khampas gave up their fighting and left Manang District to settle near the border with Tibet. The Government of Nepal offered some of them refuge in the valley of Langtang, in Sindhupalchok District to the east. About this time, a feud between two contending factions of Khampas resulted in a bloody ambush and battle in the forest where the trail from Nar crosses the Marsyangdi Khola into Koto.

After the Khampas left Manang, representatives of King Mahendra of Nepal came to talk with us about disarming and handing over our weapons. I guess he was worried we had so many weapons; we were concerned with improving our livelihoods. In the negotiations, we demanded three things. First, we wanted Nepali citizenship and passports for travel. Second, we wanted permanent tax exemption on trade goods. And third, we wanted the trails up the Marsyangdi Khola Gorge into upper Manang Valley widened and improved. Unlike the wide trail of today, the trail even thirty years ago was steep and dangerous. In some places we had to scale the cliffs on bamboo ladders and planks of wood wedged into the rock cracks.

In 1976, King Mahendra himself visited Manang. *Akhay* (grandfather) Jungme and Akhay Mani are the only two men still alive who negotiated with him. Akhay Mani was the Village Leader and State Governor from Manang Village. Akhay Jungme was only thirty years old then and a *dhozum*, a person chosen to serve for a year enforcing village livestock and crop rules. In upper Manang, we mostly choose newly married and highly active male members of the community to fill the eight rotating dhozum positions. Other members of the negotiation team included Jungme from Manang Village, Khamsung from Pisang, Rinchen from Braga, Jamling from Ghyaru, Pemba from Ngawal, and Dilli Jang Gurung's son Manindra Jang Gurung of Mungji and Ghan Pokhara (Lamjung) also helped. They were good negotiators and secured all of our demands. We handed over most of our guns to the Government of Nepal.


© DM, 1964

Khampa carving manistone

Manang became the first region in Nepal whose residents received citizenship cards and passports for travel outside of neighbouring Asian countries, transforming many Manangpa into wealthy businessmen.

Theleku (not Kreku as on some maps) is a small settlement of a few houses and hotels among apple orchards located about a half hour west of Chame on the north bank of the Marsyangdi Khola.

Brathang is the highest village in the region of Gyasumdo. Its name refers to the massive cliffs towering hundreds of feet above the Marsyangdi Khola.

Brathang also has apple orchards. The village was once a camp for the Khampa guerrillas who controlled the nearby bridge in Dhukure Pokhari (dove pond) and all travel across it to the north from the early 1960s to the mid 1970s.

In the 1950s, the Khampas planted apple trees in Brathang. Eventually, in the late 1970s, farmers from several villages in Manang District formed an apple grower's cooperative. Organic, highly flavourful, high-altitude apples from the orchards in and around Theleku and Brathang are popular for export.

Travelers entering upper Manang encounter the **Great Wall of Pisang** — a huge slate arc sweeping 1,200 meters upwards from the valley floor. The ethnic Gurungs call it Oble Dome, the Manangpas Nghurung Khang, and the Nepalis Swarga Danda or Paungda Danda. Each name means essentially the 'Mountain of Heaven'.

The Great Wall is between the villages of Brathang and Pisang at the southern edge of the Pisang Forest, marking the division between Gyasumdo and Nyeshang. Geologically it is the upturned section of an ancient lakebed. There are many legends and practices associated with the Great Wall in both ethnic Shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism. Religious precepts strictly prohibit climbing the wall. At the top of the Great Wall are two stone formations described as either a temple with a dog-hitching post, or the house of a *bhaje* (grandfather) with himself standing beside it.

Until recently, traders from neighbouring Lamjung and lower Manang District carried heavy loads of trade goods, including some salt, into upper Manang. Their route took them across a wooden bridge directly under where the Great Wall rises steeply towards the sky.

Sometimes one of the more experienced traders would dash ahead, hide his full *doko* (basket) beside the trail, and disappear into the forest. Then, as the others approached the bridge, they stopped and called out to the *bhaje* of the mountain, "Hey, hey! What are the trading prices, grandfather?" The man would shout back, as if from the mountaintop, "Hey, hey! The trading prices are good!"

For ethnic Gurungs of lower Manang, the Great Wall is an important place to visit during one's life and an important location on the final adventure - death. In ethnic Gurung death rituals, the Great Wall is the entrance to the land of the dead. The soul of the dead must ascend the Great Wall led by a death *shaman* in a ritual predating the arrival of Buddhism in the Himalaya.

> It is important for us (ethnic Gurungs) to travel to the Great Wall and pay our respects to our dead relatives. In the forest below, we build *chorten* monuments in honour of them. We make offerings of burning juniper branches and shout their names in the direction of the Great Wall, which shouts the name back at us (as an echo). In the centre of the *chorten,* we plant a tree seedling. If the tree grows well, then we know their soul is at peace and complete in the afterlife, but if the tree grows stunted or poorly, then their soul is in torment. If the tree dies, we know their soul has not left this realm yet and is hanging around as an evil spirit that might harm our family members. In this case, we conduct a ritual to exorcize the soul. If our relative died away from home, then the *chortens* sometimes contain their ashes or a piece of bone.

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Gurung Death Ritual

For ethnic Gurungs, the large stone feature at the top of the Great Wall represents the 'Temple of the Dead', **Sa Yi Gompa**. In the ritual, a death *shaman* directs the soul on its journey to the top, passing actual geographic points such as the place of the 'great stones' and the 'black waters' where the soul must lie down on its stomach and drink. After initially refusing, the soul drinks and realizes it has died and there is no way back to its former life.

The death *shaman* then offers a gift of grain to the spirits of the four directions and eight regions, requesting them to open the way for the departed soul to proceed to the afterlife. After passing through Drag Thank, a meadow surrounded by huge cliffs, and then crossing the Marsyangdi Khola, the soul sees the Great Wall and climbs to the top, to the Sa Yi Gompa and the doorway into the world of the dead.

Deceased ancestors greet the new soul and the *shaman*, who has accompanied it this far, transforms himself into a vulture and flies back down the Great Wall to his village below to complete the ritual. Some say this is why there are so many Lammergeier Vultures seen soaring on the updrafts around the top of the Great Wall.

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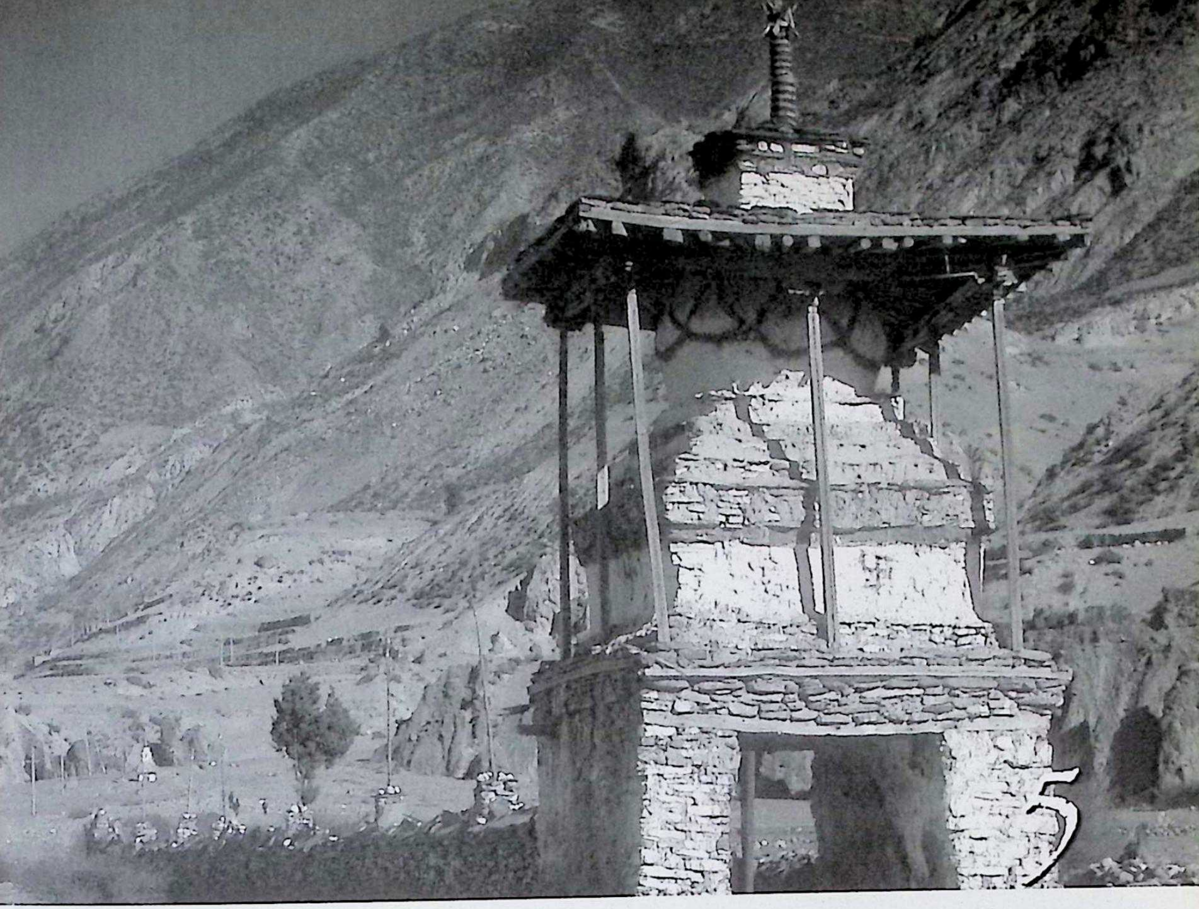
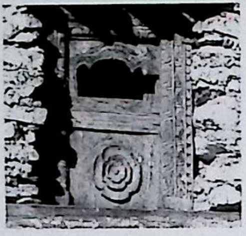


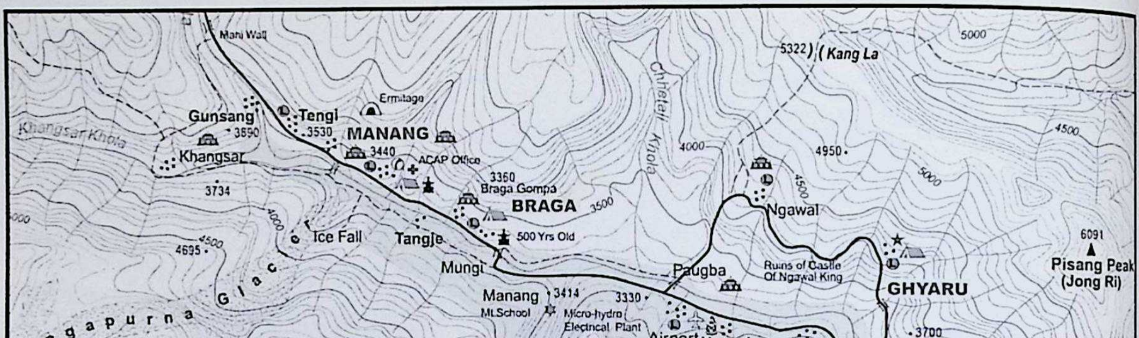
5

CHAPTER

Stories of Nyeshang, Upper Manang



Stories of Nyeshang, Upper Manang


Mani Wall
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Ermitage
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Chhetali Khola
4000
4950
4500
3734
3360
Braga Gompa
BRAGA
3500
Ngawal
Ice Fall
Tangje
500 Yrs Old
4695
Mungi
Paugba
Ruins of Castle Of Ngawal King
GHYARU
6091
Pisang Peak (Jong Ri)
Gangapurna Glacier
Manang
3414
ML School
3330
Micro-hydro Electrical Plant
Airport
Hongde
3280
Norodhara (Tea Shop)
3700
A Small Green Lake
5500
Sabje Khola
Milarepa's Cave
Open only in summer Time
4889
Thin Forest
5249
UPPER PISANG
LOWER PISANG
3060
7454
Gangapurna Himal
7000
6000
6500
6742
Avalanche
3429
Marsyangdi River
7555
Annapurna III
6102
5218
Memorial to Japanese Mountainer Akira Ochiai
4764
Hunwali
East Annapurna Glacier
Modi Khola
5421
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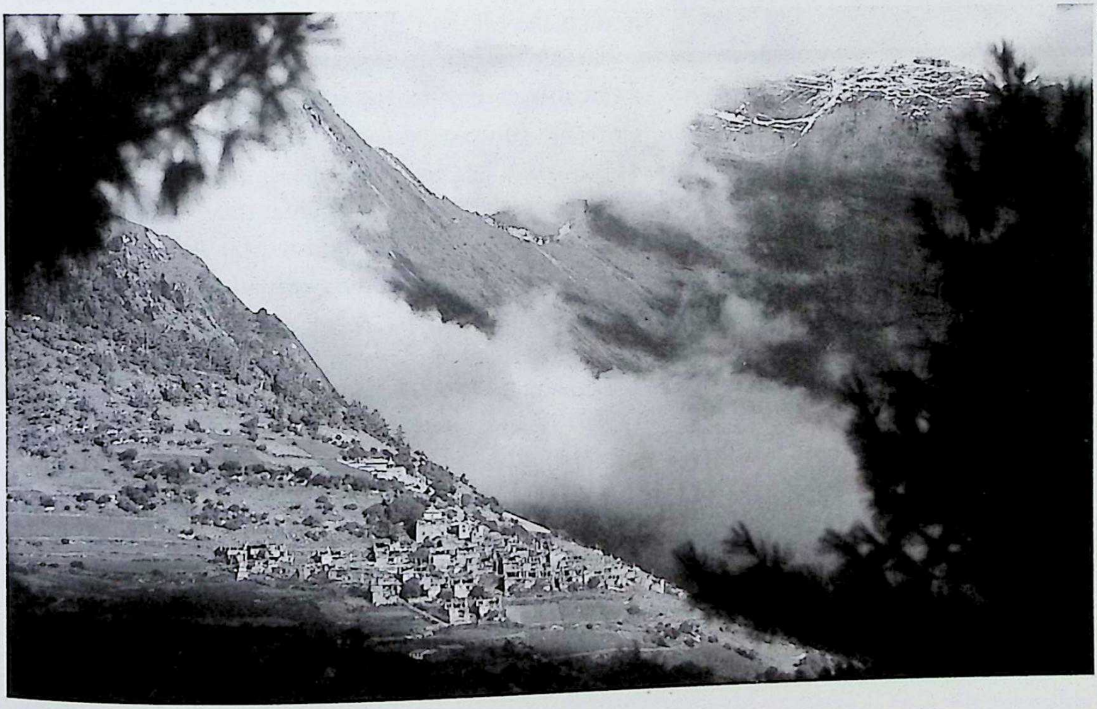
4669
6248
Gandharba Chuli
7525
Annapurna IV
7937
Annapurna II
4500

Nyeshang is the largest region and valley in Manang District. Its name means 'us from Shang', an area of Tibet. The valley of Manang is the most like Tibet and most of the people are Tibetan Buddhists. *Nyeshang-ten* is the name for the people from Nyeshang.

The village of **Pisang** is just beyond the Great Wall. The villagers of Pisang are know as *Pi-thye*. Tongkang is another name for Pisang, meaning 'guest house' or, more specifically, a public place to spend the night. Pisang has two parts, an older village possibly settled in the 17th century now called Pisang Maathi, and *Naya* (New) Pisang, built more recently along the riverside trail to cater to tourists. Pisang Maathi was originally called Pi from the *Nyeshangte* (language of upper Manang) word *pima*, meaning 'to cooperate' or work together. Pisang also means 'common land' referring to the 'common' cooperative forest and land shared between the villages of Pisang and Tapche, land separated by the Sukeko Khola. This common land between these two villages no longer exists both as a result of a fight as well as newer settlements being established between them.

> Long before building the village of Pisang, there was a large *pima* (cooperative) forest here where the men from Manang Village, Braga, and Ngawal hunted. They were skilled at crossbow and arrows, hunting deer, Himalayan *tahr* (goat),



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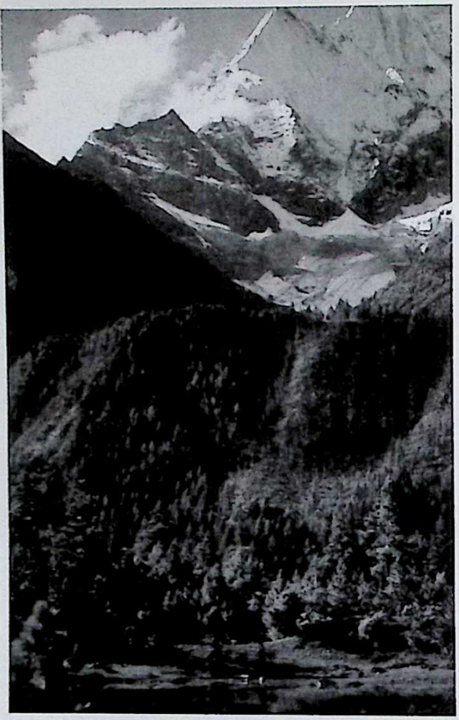

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birds, and other wild animals. They hunted many of these animals for meat, material, and medicine, like the musk of musk deer. Musk was very popular, so our grandfathers used to take it to trade in India and Burma.

Today the men of Pisang are famous as the best archers and horse racers in upper Manang. You can see several practicing grounds here and if you come at the right time, you can watch the annual archery contest, Metha.

On the way to upper Manang Valley, the trail splits into two routes, an upper and a lower. The lower trail follows the riverbank of the Marsyangdi Khola through what remains of Pisang Forest. Along this route is a *mani* wall constructed nearly 200 years ago by a man named Dhasangma from Pisang Village. Before this *mani* wall was constructed the houses in lower Pisang faced north towards the Marsyangdi Khola, but now they face the wall. (Almost every village along the trail has a *mani* wall either constructed by prosperous individuals or with donations contributed from every house.)

The upper trail climbs steeply up the northern mountainside. It passes the ancient ruins of two strategic fortresses used by the royal Ghale family of Manang and the oldest *gompa* in Manang, in the village of Ngawal.

The Lower Valley

Hongde is the first main village on the lower route. The name comes from the Tibetan word *homa* meaning 'milk'. Hongde used to be the only village where milk was available and yaks continue to pasture here today. As one of only a few flat places in the Manang Valley, the airport for Manang District is located here.

Nearby, **Mungji** is a tiny village with a few teashops. Mungji means 'a place where tall grass grows,' or a pasture. The **Sher Gompa**, or the 'east-facing gompa' established by Lama Dawa of the village of Braga is here. Lama Dawa had two sons and one daughter. Both his sons were monks and his daughter was an *ani* (celibate nun). When Lama Dawa died, one of his sons went to study at Thrangu Gompa in Kathmandu. There he found hundreds of *ani's* and about ten years ago offered Sher Gompa to his mentor, Thrangu Rinpoche, to establish a retreat and meditation centre for nuns. It started out as a small retreat centre with eight rooms where nuns would come to do *Lho Sum Tsam* (retreat for three years, three months and three days). The *gompa* is now expanding to sixteen rooms.

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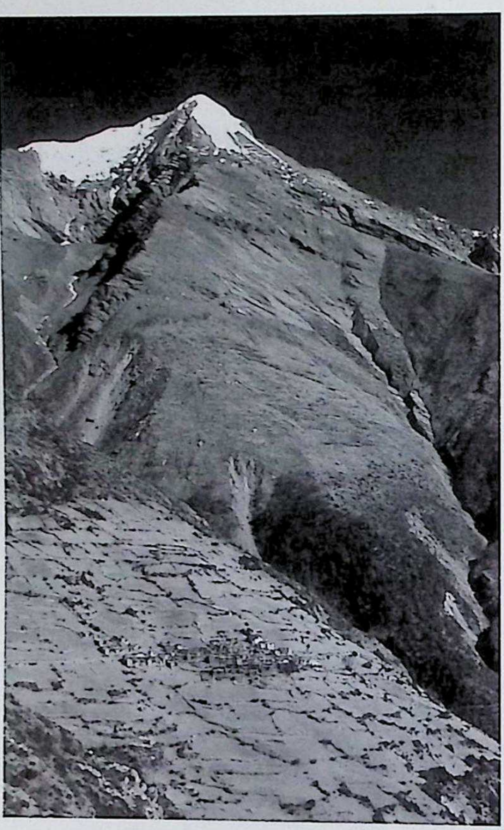
The High Ridge

The village of **Ghyaru** is the first village on the high route through upper Manang Valley. Its name comes from the word *yaru,* meaning 'yak horn'. The people of Ghyaru are called as *Ghyar-ten.* The climb to Ghyaru is spectacular for the mountain views up and down the Manang Valley and of the Great Wall.

> Many years ago, there were two brothers. The elder brother had two names, Shreb Namla Phurba, and Lama Gyarab Dorje. He could turn milk into three walnuts in a *tama shanga* (copper bowl). Some people say Lama Gyarab was a reincarnation of Guru Rinpoche. The younger brother's name was Kunjo Dakla Chuba, but usually he was called Dorje Nima.
>
> Many hundreds of years ago these two brothers traveled from a place called Nyehupaling in Tibet and settled in a place called Guru Shangu in Mustang District. There they met a third man, Syamrang Ghale, who was the abandoned son of a Tibetan King. They lived there for seven years before traveling together over the high mountain passes to Manang. They first settled in the village of Phu and stayed there a long time, conducting many religious *pujas* to increase their power over the area.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One day at the end of a long *puja*, Lama Gyarab teased his brother Dorje Nima by asking if he could say *Om Vajra Killi-killi*. Dorje Nima lisped, you know, and usually said, "*Om Vajra Chilli-chilli*." Dorje Nima was embarrassed and angry with his brother for teasing him. In frustration, he threw his *phurba* (ritual dagger) at the cliff face. Amazingly, where it struck the stone, water instantly sprang out.

"Oh - ho!" Exclaimed Lama Gyarab when he saw this. He wondered if he had powers like his brother. He decided the only way to find out was to go towards the village of Nar and live for a year near the bridge that crosses the Nar Khola.

The villagers in Nar asked Lama Gyarab to help them construct a *chorten*. He agreed and soon had the entire village working to help make it. However, the women and children had a hard time carrying the heavy stones from the river and began to have bad thoughts about Lama Gyarab for asking them to work so hard.

Lama Gyarab could read minds and decided to leave his house near the bridge. He moved to Kang-La Danda, a hill near the pass on the way to Ngawal village. The villagers of Nar completed the *chorten* and all that remained was *Raamnye* (the dedication prayer). It was only then the villagers discovered Lama Gyarab had left.

The women felt guilty for thinking evil of the *lama*, so they traveled to Khang La Danda to apologize and beg him to return for Raamnye. Lama Gyarab said, "I can do the Raamnye from here."

He asked the women to bring three *dokos* (baskets) of wheat to him, then return to the chorten and spread a clean cloth on the ground around it. He did the prayer and threw the wheat into the air as an offering to the deities. With his powers, the wheat landed on the cloth surrounding the *chorten* in the village down below. When the women gathered the wheat, it filled six *dokos* instead of three.

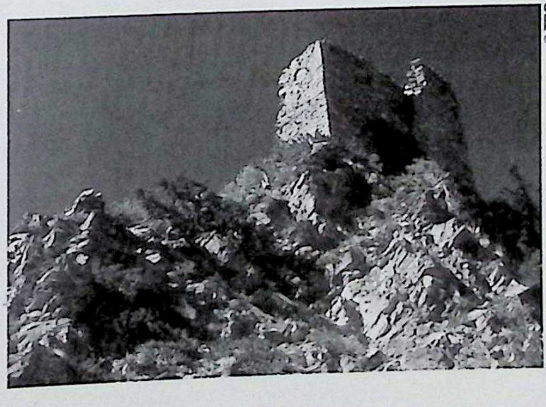
Lama Gyarab knew then he had powers like his brother. He rejoined his brother and Syamrang Ghale and together they traveled towards the valley of Manang.

For their journey they had many yaks with them to carry their loads. However, one yak got sick on the way. He died in a place called Nyalbu Chauri Goth, a high pasture where we sometimes take our animals to graze in the summer. Lama Gyarab cut the yak's carcass into many pieces for the vultures to eat. One vulture flew away with the yak's ribs. It dropped the ribs in a place in the eastern part of Ngawal Village called *rhu,* or *rae,* which means 'rib'.

Lama Gyarab thought about all of this and felt the yak's death was a good omen. He kept the yak's horn and planted seven wheat seeds inside, chanted a *mantra,* and waited. "If the seeds germinate in seven days," he said, "then it is a good place to farm and we will settle here." They did germinate and Lama Gyarab built the **Yaru Gompa** on the spot where the yak horn rested. This is how Lama Gyarab founded Ghyaru village, named after him, and why we still farm wheat and buckwheat here on the steep slopes.

Syamrang Ghale also settled near Ghyaru, in Ngawal, establishing himself as the first Ghale Raja. Lama Gyarab married Syamrang Ghale's sister and their children settled the Manang Valley. We call the descendents of Lama Gyarab and Syamrang Ghale's sister the Pande Lama sub-clan.

Shortly past the village of Ghyaru is **Tiwal Danda,** or Thingwol, the 'red fort on the cliff'. The ruins of Tiwal Danda are in much better repair than those of Kyung Dzong in Ngawal, the original *durbar* (fortress or palace) of upper Manang built by Syamrang Ghale. When the Mustang Ghale Raja's took over power in Manang, they shifted their residence from Kyung Dzong to this new strategic position on the cliff overlooking the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entire Manang Valley. It was possible to see people approaching Tiwal Danda well in advance and roll stones down onto unwelcome enemies.

The Mustang Raja was a Tibetan king residing in the next major valley to the west of the Manang Valley. The most remembered ruler from Mustang was not a *raja*, but a *rani* (queen), remembered only as *Aama* (mother). According to local legend, Aama came to Manang 250 years ago. There is no reference to a king or husband, either because he was dead, or had left Aama to rule as the *raja* in Mustang District. It is a repetitive theme in many Nepali legends, and even some current belief systems, that husbandless women are 'witches' or have supernatural powers. Aama was reputed to be a powerful sorceress.

> Aama had six strong, boastful, and proud sons. Some say they were the strongest men in Nyeshang. This made the men of Manang Village jealous, so they challenged the brothers to a contest of strength.
>
> We used to break trees into planks of lumber by hammering small wood wedges into the tree to make it split and then forcing the split open and into two pieces. The men of Manang Village challenged the six brothers to break a very large tree into two planks, and because they were very arrogant and proud, they agreed before seeing the size of the tree. They soon found it impossible to split the tree into planks. Exhausted and nervous they placed their hands in the split made by the wedges, trying to force it open with their combined strength. Before they realized what was happening, the men from Manang Village had removed the wedges, and the six brothers found their hands stuck in the big tree. They lost their balance and rolled with the tree off the edge of the cliff to their deaths.

There are several versions of this story of the challenge, including one that recalls multiple tests of strength. One of these tests involved the six brothers keeping their balance as they walked along a plank jutting out from high up the cliffs over the Marsyangdi Khola. Apparently, when the men from Manang Village constructed the plank, they purposely made it weak in one spot. Everything was going in the favour of the six brothers until they walked on the plank that then either broke, or caused them to lose their balance, falling to their deaths.

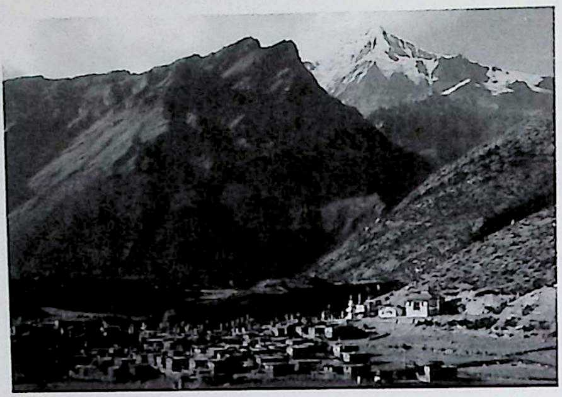
Aama was deeply saddened and ferociously angry at the death of all her sons. To take her revenge, she called the powerful Lama Sangle to help her block the Marsyangdi Khola and flood out the people of Manang Village. (Regardless of the following and several other mythical interpretations, there is significant evidence a lake did form in the upper valley of Manang, triggered by an earthquake or landslide, temporarily blocking the waters of the Marsyangdi Khola between the villages of Pisang and Hongde.)

> Lama Sangle told Aama to throw her *bhata* (washing bowl) into the river. When she did this, the river was blocked and a lake formed. The villagers of Manang Village were scared their fields and homes would be flooded and they came to Aama to apologize for the death of her sons. They begged her to release the dam, but she was still in mourning and refused. Only after they sacrificed a yak did she use her sorceress powers to remove the *bhata* and the dam opened, releasing the water and draining the lake. Shortly after, Aama left Manang and returned to Mustang.

Some say when Aama fled Manang in the late 18th century to return to her paternal home in Mustang District, Manang fell to the Gorkhali Army led by Prithivi Narayan Shah during the Gorkha Conquest (to unify Nepal). Then, when she fled Mustang across the Koro-La Pass into Western Tibet, Mustang fell to the Gorkhali Army.

> After Aama left, the Gorkhali Army invaded Manang from Lamjung, traveling up the Marsyangdi Khola. They set up a base camp on the hill opposite and below Tiwal Danda. We fought them with spears, bows and arrows, for many months, but neither side could triumph.

Finally in desperation, the Gorkhali Army pretended to retreat down the Marsyangdi. In the secret of night, they returned, climbing high up behind the fortress with their horses and supplies and making camp under a large overhanging cliff called **Ta-Wu**, the 'horse cave'. This cave is above Ghyaru. From this cave, they were able to descend undetected down the ridge and launch their attack just before dawn. Tiwal Danda was easily defeated and the kingdom of Manang became part of the newly consolidated kingdom of Nepal.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Ngawal and Ghyaru are two of the oldest settlements in upper Manang Valley. Once they were one village, separated by an unsolvable feud. The name for **Ngawal** comes from the red colour of the Ghale Raja's first *durbar* called Tangro, or **Kyung Dzong** in Nyeshangte. The ruins of this fortress are barely visible as a heap of stones near the Knyalwa Chorten on the cliffs below and to the east of Ngawal village.

Ngawal has three *gompas,* the **Karma Samtenling Gompa,** the **Kyung Gompa,** and the oldest, **Pongpa Gompa,** also called Ngawal Gompa. Pongpa comes from *phenpa,* meaning 'to reserve', for the area was 'reserved' by the first Ghale Raja, Syamrang, for his descendents. For this reason, Ngawal is interchangeable with Pongpa, and the villagers known as *Pongpa-ten.*

On the trail between Ghyaru and Ngawal, close to the *mani* wall, you can see a small stone hut nestled in a grove of evergreen trees near the base of the cliff above the trail. This is **Nyalshong.**

> More than six hundred years ago, Ani Pema, daughter of the fourth Ghale Raja, was a nun. She was making a rug in the sun when it began to hail. Ani Pema was thirsty so she picked up and ate a hailstone as she ran from the storm. However, the it was not a normal hailstone, and Ani Pema became pregnant.
>
> At first, she panicked, not knowing what to do if people found out, since she was unmarried. Then she remembered Nyalshong and decided to go there for a meditation retreat lasting three years, three months, and three days. This is how she hid her pregnancy. Pema gave birth to a son nine months after eating the hailstone. His name was Tenzing Khyaba.

In another version, Ani Pema was meditating when it hailed and she became pregnant after eating a hailstone. In yet another version her father discovers her pregnancy and demands to know how a celibate nun became pregnant while in meditation, to which she replies she ate a hailstone.

When her retreat ended, Pema wondered, "What will I do with my son?" She could not take him back with her to her father's *durbar*, so she left him with a mother sheep in a cave near Nyalshong. If her son were a *Tulku,* then he would survive on the sheep's milk.

In Ngawal, there was a *gothala* (herder) who frequently took his sheep into the high pastures near Nyalshong. In the evening, he returned home to milk the sheep but one white sheep never gave him any milk. The owner of the sheep scolded him and accused him of drinking all the milk of the white sheep for himself. The herder was angry so he followed the sheep one day to see whether it was giving milk. He found that the sheep was going into a cave. Following the sheep inside, he found the child, Tenzing Khyaba.

The *gothala* brought Tenzing back to Ngawal. He was healthy but naked without a stitch of clothing and fatherless. The *gothala* kept him in the barn with his chickens. Even today, Ghale's are not supposed to eat sheep or chicken meat because we remember the mother sheep and the chickens who fed and cared for Tenzing Khyaba.

When the Ghale Raja, who had a terrible temper, found out about Tenzing he yelled, "Who is this boy? He must be the devil!" With that, he put Tenzing in a dungeon where he stayed for many years.

As Tenzing grew up, the Ghale Raja continued to be suspicious of him. He devised a way to get rid of Tenzing, by challenging him to a competition of strength. The fourth Ghale Raja was very arrogant and believed he was invincible. He did not know his daughter Pema had been secretly feeding and caring for Tenzing and that he was a very strong man now. "If I win, you will be thrown out of the village never to return," the Raja said. "And if you win, I will hand over my kingdom to you."

Tenzing won.

They had agreed so the king could do nothing. He proclaimed Tenzing as the new king, the fifth Ghale Raja, and left Manang. He never returned.

> Tenzing married a very gentle girl from Ngawal Village. One day during harvest, she took food and rice wine to the farmers working in the fields. On the way, she met a famous *lama* named Khyedu Karma Lopsang who was traveling through Manang. The queen asked Lama Lopsang to come to the palace to rest and eat. She was beautiful and kind and Lama Lopsang agreed.
>
> After he ate, he asked the *raja* and *rani* if they had any children. In fact, the *raja* and *rani* were worried for they had no children after being married a long time. They asked Lama Lopsang to do a *puja* (ritual) so they could have three sons. Lama Lopsang agreed and asked only that they give him their middle son to teach the Buddhist Dharma.
>
> In no time, the Ghale Raja and Rani had three sons and when the second son was still a child, they gave him to Lama Lopsang to study to become a monk. This boy took the name Lama Khyedu Karma Wangyal. This is how the tradition of sending the middle child to study Buddhism began in Manang.

Lama Lopsang spread Kargyupa Buddhism throughout the Himalaya. During his lifetime, he built 108 Kargyupa *gompas*, including Braga Gompa in Braga Village, and Tashi Lakhang in the village of Phu. The descendants of Lama Khyedu Karma Wangyal, middle son of the fifth Ghale Raja and founder of Braga Village, are the Brag Lama sub-clan. The elder son married in Ngawal and then moved to Lamjung or Gorkha District to settle, while the younger son settled in Kaski District.

About 400 meters up from Ngawal Village is **Ney Guru Shangpo,** a very powerful and mystical cave. Stories of this cave trace back to a Tibetan king whose son, Syamrang Ghale (who became the first Ghale King of Manang), was born with the head of a dog. (It is also possible that this is the same cave where the white mother sheep fed Tenzing Khyaba.)

> The Tibetan king was so embarrassed and ashamed of his son he put him in a leather bag and threw him away in the river. A *lama* from Manang saw the baby in a vision and sent his disciples to find the child. This river flowed from Tibet to Manang, so they were able to find the bag. However, when they opened it they found the child's head had transformed back to that of a human. The child's name was Syamrang Ghale.

Syamrang Ghale was very sick after his long journey down the river, so the *lama* placed him on the branch of a sandalwood tree inside the Ney Guru Shangpo cave for safety.

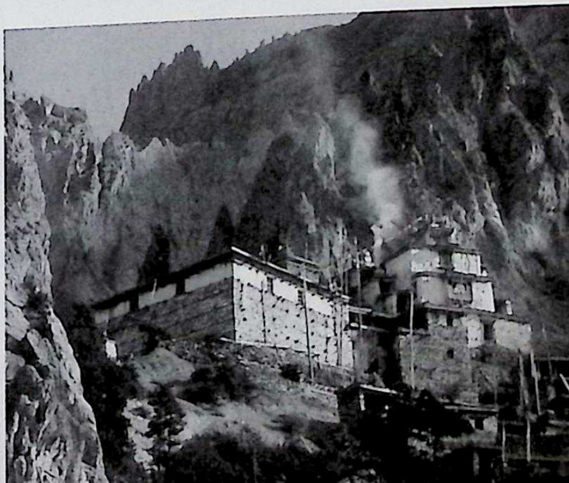
At the same time, the villagers of Ngawal were searching for someone to be their ruler. They decided to use an elephant they kept in the Ney Guru Shangpo cave to help them in their quest. They gave the elephant a *norbu* (wish fulfilling gem) and declaired who ever the elephant gave the *norbu* to would be their king. The elephant returned to the cave and gave the *norbu* to the child, Syamrang Ghale. Many years later, after traveling to many places including Mustang and Nar, Syamrang became the first Ghale Raja of Ngawal.

Twice a year during the sixth and ninth months of the Tibetan calendar, villagers from Ngawal and Ghyaru go to the Ney Guru Shangpo cave to pray. On the sixth month, they go to the cave to receive blessings for a successful Yartung (horse racing festival), and on the ninth month, they pay tribute in thanks for a bountiful harvest. Some legends suggest that the cave has a long, secret tunnel that goes through the mountains all the way to Muktinath, a famous and sacred temple in Mustang District on the other side of the Thorong-La Pass.

Leaving Ngawal, the trail splits as it heads towards Braga Village. The upper trail goes through the tiny settlement of **Chulu,** while the lower one passes immediately through **Kyung.**

The Upper Valley

Braga is an important village in Nyeshang sitting where the upper and lower trails routes through the Manang Valley converge. *Bra* means 'cliff' and *ka* means 'white', referring to the pale-colored cliffs rising above the village. The name could also be a mispronunciation of *drakar*, meaning 'the white cliff place'. The people of Braga are *Brag-ten*.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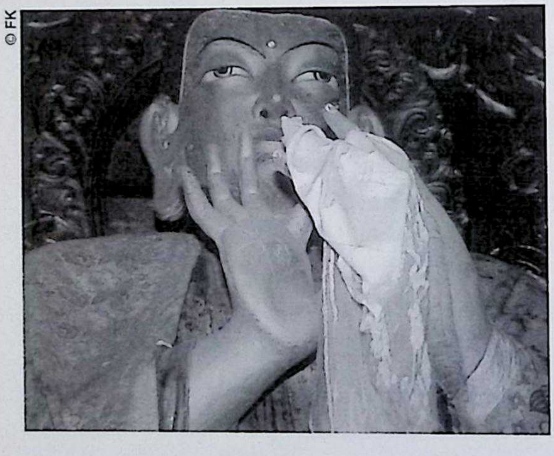
The famous **Braga Gompa** was built by the middle son of the fifth Ghale Raja of Ngawal, Lama Wangyal, and his *guru* (teacher or mentor), Lama Lopsang. Local residents say the *gompa* is 503 years old and is very powerful, granting you any wish you ask for.

During the gompa's construction, Lama Lopsang planted a garden in a sacred field below Braga. Many years later, the Nepali government chose to build an office building on the sacred land. After numerous complaints, they removed it. After the harvest, in August or September, children from each house in Braga take wheat from this field every day for a week to the *gompa,* chanting the names of Lama Lopsang and Lama Wangyal.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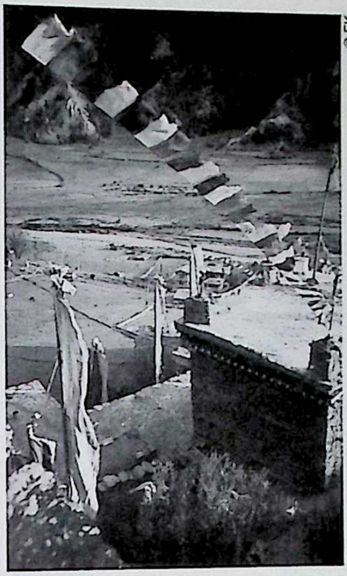
There is a statue of Lord Buddha in the top room of the Braga Gompa made by Lama Wangyal. For reasons unknown, he was unable to complete the Buddha's face, so Lama Lopsang finished it. Shrungma is the name of the small room at top, which women can not enter. An eleven-headed Chenrezig statue dominates the room. Its top most head, called Opamay, represents the Amitabha Buddha. In the main hall, 108 small statues of Buddha surround the images of Tara, Samantabhadra, and Mahakala. The *gompa* also houses many religious books, including *Kaghyur* (direct teaching of the Buddha), *Tenghyur* (scientific philosophy and magic), and *Bum* (religious philosophy). A pair of large Phakpa Jampa statues, the oldest in the *gompa,* contain the hair, called *utta,* of Guru Rinpoche. One of the statues is repainted and one is in its original form.

Of the 108 gompas built by Lama Lopsang throughout the Himalaya, the Braga Gompa is believed to be the only one still housing artefacts dated to its founding in the 15th century. The *gompa* contains some of the oldest original artwork in the region. Whereas other *gompas* have lost spiritual and ritual objects to thieves who sell them to tourists and private collectors, the villagers of Braga take turns guarding and sleeping in the *gompa* and are on



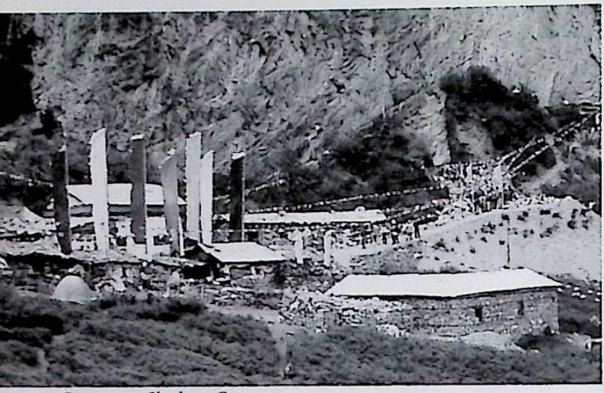
constant vigilance. The Braga Gompa follows the *Kargyupa*, *Nyingmapa*, and *Shakyapa* sects of Tibetan Buddhism.

> Lama Karma Tsering is the current *lama* of the Braga Gompa. He was born in the early 1930's. As a teenager, Lama Tsering traveled to many foreign countries as a nomadic trader. One day, he realized his calling was Buddhism and decided that he would study *dharma* for the betterment of his present life as well as his next life rather than being a *zigden* (ordinary person).
>
> At eighteen, he became a disciple of Lama Gyalbo, a rinpoche from Ngawal. He studied under Lama Gyalbo until he was in his late fifties, and Lama Gyalbo died. After Lama Gyalbo died, Lama Karma Tsering went into retreat for ten years. Then Lama Dorje, the previous head Lama of the Braga Gompa, died. That was eleven years ago.
>
> The position of the Braga Gompa head *lama* has passed from father to elder son for many generations. Lama Dorje's son, Lom Doba Ghale, moved to Tibet, and so when Lama Dorje died the lineage was broken for the first time. Because the *lama* of the Braga Gompa must be a Ghale, we chose Lama Tsering to replace Lama Dorje. He is from the same family but not the same lineage.

Across from Braga on the opposite side of the Marsyangdi Khola is the **Shyakung Cave,** also known as the Milarepa Cave. Legend says that Milarepa, the famous sage, poet, mystic and Buddhist teacher, visited this cave about 963 years ago to meditate and teach. He traveled and lived in many caves during his lifetime, including six 'well-known' caves and six 'unknown' caves.

Milarepa was born to an affluent family during the Tibetan Middle Ages in a place in Tibet called Kyanga Tsa. He attained supreme enlightenment in the course of only one lifetime, an achievement as-of-yet not replicated.

Milarepa meditated once with Calm Light Repa near Mount Kailash in Tibet and dreamt that his disciple was Khyira Fho Gom Dorje, one of Calm



Gompa near Shyakung Cave

Light Repa's eight sons. Khyira Fho Dorje was a hunter, living in upper Manang, renowned for his skills at killing sheep, deer, and musk deer, with the help of his devoted dog. In the dream, Milarepa saw he was a kind-hearted man, only directed on the wrong path.

Milarepa came to upper Manang to meditate in Shyakung Cave near the forest where Khyira Fho Dorje hunted. He wished to help free the dog and the hunter from their sinful lifestyle and meditated in the cave a long time, waiting for the hunter to pass his way.

One day Khyira Fho Dorje was chasing a deer along a path past the cave where Milarepa was meditating. As they approached, Milarepa noticed how tired and frightened the deer looked, so he called the deer to him and explained that if the deer rested its head on his knee it would be safe.

The deer quickly fell fast asleep on the left knee of Milarepa. At the same time Khyira Fho Dorje's dog was preparing to attack the deer. Milarepa chanted a *mantra* to the dog and it realized that if he killed the deer then his pain would be the same, and that if blood flowed from the deer then his blood would also flow. Struck by the truth of what Milarepa said, the dog lay down, resting his head on Milarepa's right knee.

Khyira Fho Dorje saw this and thought Milarepa was a demon. He wondered if he should kill him. Milarepa could read minds and saw this thought, so he told Khyira Fho Dorje, "If you want to kill me you can, but only after listening to what I say first." Fearful of Milarepa's powers, the hunter agreed to listen.

Milarepa taught the hunter a long lesson on respecting all life and why we should not kill. He reminded the hunter that all animals are our friends. He taught him about the Buddha Dharma and Khyira Fho Dorje felt the magic of Milarepa. He felt guilty for years of killing innocent animals.

> At the end of the teaching, Khyira Fho Dorje threw his bow and arrow off the cliff and became Milarepa's disciple. This is why it is called Shyakung Cave, which means 'paying for regrets'.

Some people say Shyakung has another meaning as a place to store meat, for *shya* means 'meat' and *kung* means 'heap'. When Khyira Fho Dorje needed to butcher and store his kill he came to this cave, which is why Milarepa chose to meditate where he was bound to meet the hunter.

After his conversion to Buddhism, Khyira Fho Dorje brought food and supplies to Milarepa, who taught him and the people of upper Manang about the Buddha Dharma. The hunter was an old man when he converted to Buddhism and after several years he either died or left Manang to travel with Milarepa to Tibet. There is a cave in Tibet near Mount Kailash known as the Manang Khyira Gonpo Dorje cave.

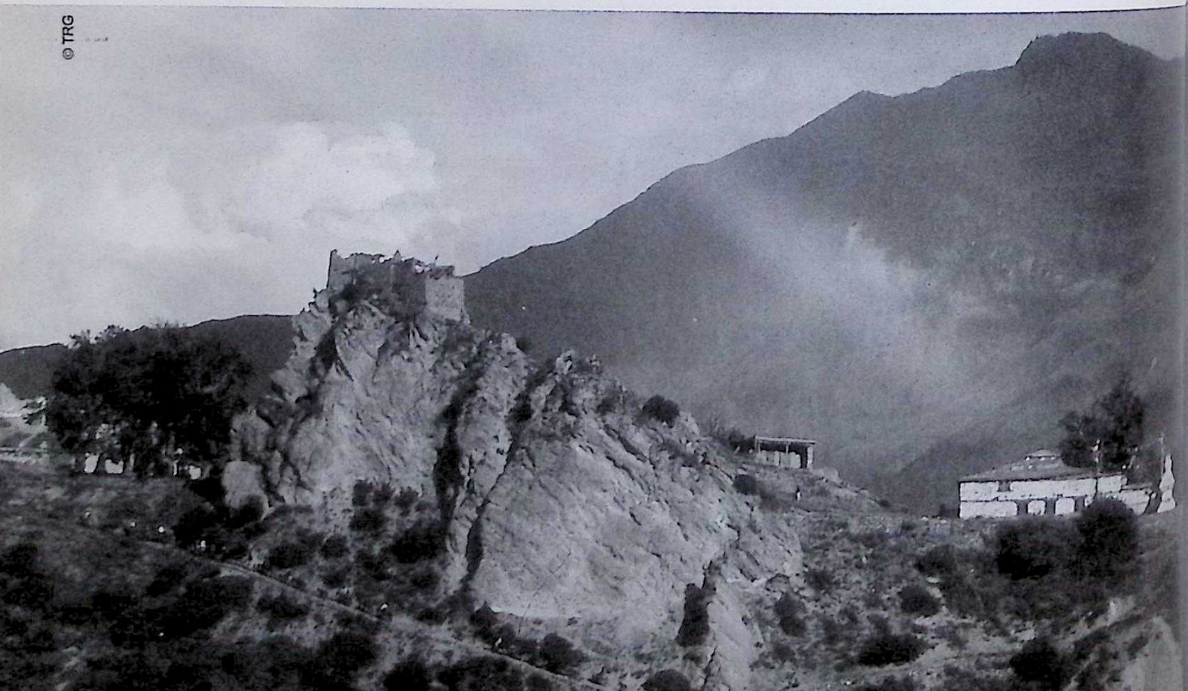
An annual festival of meditation and offerings honours Milarepa. Below the Shyakung Cave on the edge of the cliff, are the bow and arrow Khyira Fho Dorje threw away. A number of years ago the trail to the cave washed out so it is no longer approachable. The Lama of Braga asked that the trail not be fixed. A stone statue of Milarepa at the bottom of the cliff under the cave now serves as the pilgrimage destination. The **Milarepa Gompa** is also here.

> There used to be an old man from Burma who lived near Milarepa's Cave. We called him Burma Akhay. He came to Manang about forty years ago to visit, but stayed and built the Milarepa Gompa. Some believed he was a criminal who fled Burma, then learned about Milarepa and came to Manang to find the cave. He used to imitate Milarepa by eating very little and wearing only a white piece of cloth around him. He meditated for years at the Milarepa Gompa.
>
> Once Burma Akhay was unhappy. At that time, we had a very heavy rainfall and many landslides near Ghyaru. We could not survive without our harvest so we went to Burma Akhay to get his help to save our fields and crops. We asked him to make the rain stop.

> Burma Akhay came to Ghyaru the next morning and went inside the Yaru Gompa to pray. Suddenly the rain stopped and bright sunshine came out. We realized how powerful he was, for when he was unhappy bad things happened. Afterwards we visited him regularly, taking three tins of *ghee* (clarified butter) and money every month. Burma Akhay died in 2002.

On a high ridge between Braga and Manang Village are the ruins of the ancient **Bhojo Gompa,** also pronounced 'bozdo'. Lama Sonam Lendup, a relative of the Mustang Raja, and Lama Nil Dorje from Tibet founded it. It is possibly the oldest Buddhist *gompa* in Manang because it dates back more than 500 years (some people say is more than a thousand years old). The original *gompa* is in a state of complete ruin.

The new *gompa*, below the original, is the most active gompa in the region. Lama Kunsang from Manang Village is the present head Lama of Bhojo Gompa. His predecessors included Lama Tenzing Dorje, Lama Pema Tenzing, Lama Karsang, and Lama Thendup. The gompa's rituals originally followed the *Gelukpa* and *Shakyapa* traditions, but now follow the *Kargyupa* Buddhism teachings.



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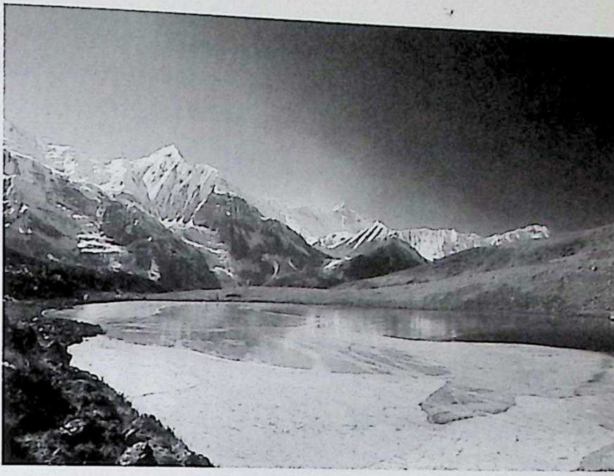
Above Braga, a trail leads to **Kyapor Tso** or Kyu Tso, meaning the 'Himalayan Snow Mountain Lake'. Kyu Tso turns a deep turquoise in the right sunlight.



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Several hundred years ago, a Lama named Lama Nil Dorje jumped into Kyapor Tso and pulled out a statue from the bottom of the lake. We keep this statue in the oldest *gompa* in Manang, the Bhojo Gompa between Braga and Manang Village.

Lama Phurba lived two generations before Lama Kunsang, the current Lama of Manang Village. He planted pine trees around the lake. In the monsoon, when many men leave Manang to trade in the south, they do prayers at the lake for a successful trip. Friday is considered the best day to leave on a trip.

In the Kyapar ceremony the *lama* brings the people of Manang Village to the lake to pray for rain. For these reasons, we believe it is a holy lake and that if you have a good soul you can see a clear vision of Braga within its calm waters.

In our stories, we remember that Lama Nil Dorje climbed up to this lake and dove in, recovering a statue of gold and turquoise from the bottom. We still keep it within the inner sanctum of the Bhojo Gompa. The villagers of Manang Village travel here every year to pray to the deities for good rain for their crops.

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Manang Village is the main settlement of upper Manang Valley in Nyeshang. People of Manang Village are called *Mar-ten*.

A long time ago three brothers from near Mount Kailash in Tibet came to settle in Tangje. The oldest brother was Kunga Dendup, the middle was Nim Tsering, and the youngest was Kami Shattar. In those times, there was only a juniper forest here called Shukchey Thang. Its name comes from *shukpa*, the word for 'juniper' in Nyeshangte. It happened that the youngest brother was in Shukchey Thang herding sheep when an old man asked his eldest brother where he had gone. Kunga Dendup replied, "He is *mung na ri*", which means 'down below in the forest'. This is how Manang Village got its name.

© FK
The old north facing door of Manang Gompa

Manang Village is below both Tangje and Tibet. The juniper forest was on the broad flat area where most of the tourist hotels are now located and where the horse racing festival is held each autumn on the full moon after harvest.

Lama Kusho Wangyal built the **Manang Gompa** in Manang Village. He was from Nubri, the northernmost settlement in Gorkha District. The Manang Gompa follows the *Nyingmapa* traditions. When Lama Wangyal constructed the *gompa,* it faced north, as did the big statues of Lord Buddha. A wide space used during festivals surrounded the *gompa.* Then forty years ago, a *tulku* recommended that the door and the statues face south.

Several man-made caves, called *gupha,* are visible across and slightly down river from the village of Manang. There are several explanations as to their significance. One story is that the original inhabitants of Manang Village lived in these caves while building the village. Another is that during a time of warfare between the kingdoms of Western Tibet and Nepal, invaders came over the southern mountains and harassed the people living in the upper Manang Valley. The wealth of upper Manang, particularly precious religious artefacts of its *gompas,* were kept in these caves for safety. A third story is that long before the permanent settlement of the upper Manang Valley, wandering ethnic Gurung yak herders stayed in these caves while pasturing their animals. It is hard to imagine anyone living in these caves for long though, because they are on the cold side of the valley, permanently in the shade of the towering mountains.

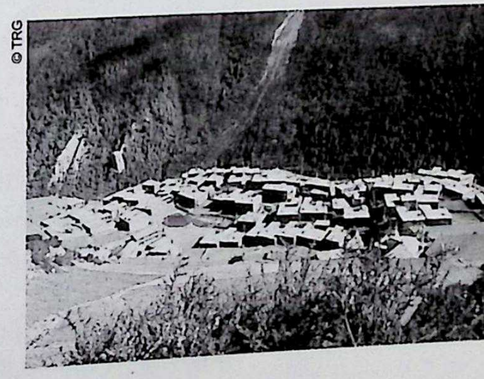
Lama Tashi

High above Manang Village at about 4500 meters on the north cliff face, is a hermitage built into the rock called **Praken Gompa.** In Tibetan, it is called Dhak Gain Gompa because *dhak* means 'cliff' and *gain* means 'to stick something', thus, the '*gompa* stuck to the cliff'. It was founded by Lama Nil Dorje and many great *lamas* have inhabited it as a place for meditation and retreat including Lama Kiku, Lama Thinglay, Lama Pema Dorje, and Lama Narshubba.

Lama Tashi and his wife currently live at the hermitage. Lama Tashi is the oldest man known to be living in Manang, born in the early 1900s. If you travel to this hermitage, he is sure to give you a sacred string called *tsemdi* and sacred food called *mani ribu.*

Only two other original villages are located beyond Manang Village. These are **Tangje,** also called Thethang or Tenge Manang, and **Khangsar.** Sometimes these two village names are combined as Thengkhar. Khangsar is the western-most village of Manang District, located alongside the Khangsar Khola beneath Tilicho Peak. Khangsar means 'new settlement' and is the newest original settlement in Nyeshang, beginning as a religious community. The local name for Khangsar is Ngaba, meaning 'the place where five people originally settled down'. Khangsar is home to the **Tare Gompa.**

Tangje means 'a pleasant and grassy place' in Nyeshangte and was originally a yak pasture located on a flat stretch of land. The village is only ruins today. The shortage of potable spring water probably explains its abandonment. Though the Marsyangdi Khola is close by, local belief prohibits the drinking of glacial water. The villagers of Tangje collected drinking water from Chame Gyartza, near Mungji, where there are 108 water spouts. However, the round trip took more than three hours. Today Sher Gompa is at the location of Chame Gyartza and the 108 spouts are called Sher Dorje Sampa.



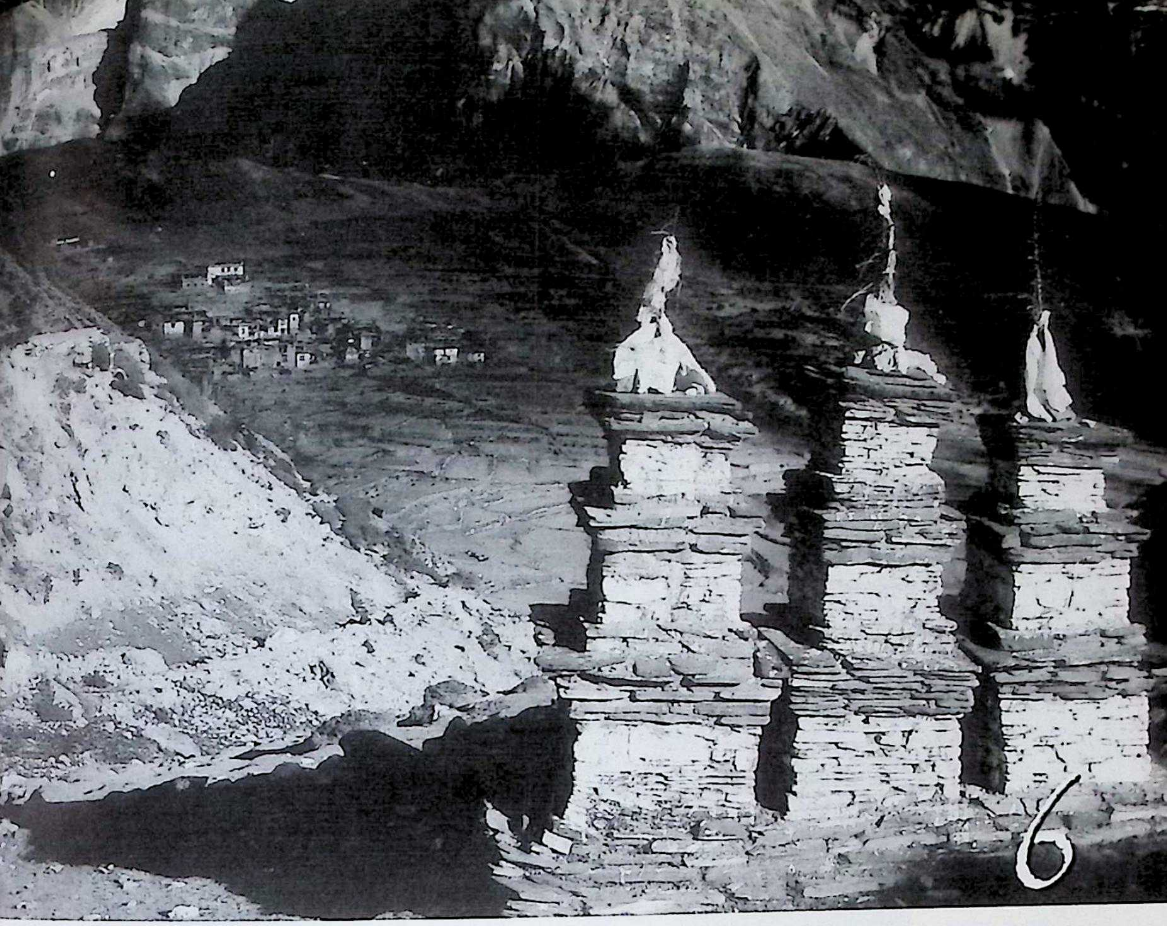
> Five generations ago, the boys from Tangje caused a lot of trouble to the people of Manang Village by riding horses through their fields and destroying their crops. They also used to cheat to win the horse races after harvest by poking thorns into their horses' tails to make them run faster. This angered the men of Manang Village and they called Lama Sangle, who practised black magic, to come and punish the boys from Tangje.
>
> Lama Sangle lived in Mustang but came to meditate at Gunsang. Some say he meditated there to scare the villagers of Tangje into leaving. Others say he spat into the river, damming the waters to form a lake in the upper part of the valley, and drown out the village of Tangje. Some say he liked to sit in the middle of the lake and meditate. Not until after the people of Tangje fled, did Lama Sangle sacrifice a yak and break the dam, draining the lake.

The people from Tangje fled to Mustang District, settling in a place of the same name near Muktinath Temple. When they left, they did several mischievous things to try to make life difficult for those in Manang Village. They put a watermill stone in a field above Manang Village, to encourage rocks to slide down on the village. They also placed a donkey's head at the source of the small Shyakthang Khola where the people from Manang Village get water for their fields. This act offended Lhu (the water spirit) and the water flow became (and remains) very low. Today, the residents of Manang Village conduct *pujas* every spring, when the water is low, to try to appease Lhu.

Gunsang is a new village on the opposite side of the river from Tangje. Further up the Jharsang Khola are three new villages built to cater to the tourist traffics going to Thorong -La Pass. These villages are **Yak Kharka,** which means a 'Yak pasture', **Letdar,** and **Thorong Phedi,** the 'base of Thorong La'.

About an hour from Manang Village is **Chongkar,** meaning 'white cliffs'. Chongkar is a viewpoint from where you can relax, view the villages below, meditate, and 'build peace within your soul'.

Another area of peace and tranquility is **Papachong,** a meadow famous for its gentle breeze and wildflowers. Papachong is so beautiful people tried to settle here but abandoned the idea and retreated to the shelter of the valley when the winter weather proved too harsh. There are still some elders in Manang Village who can recall living at Papachong when they were children.

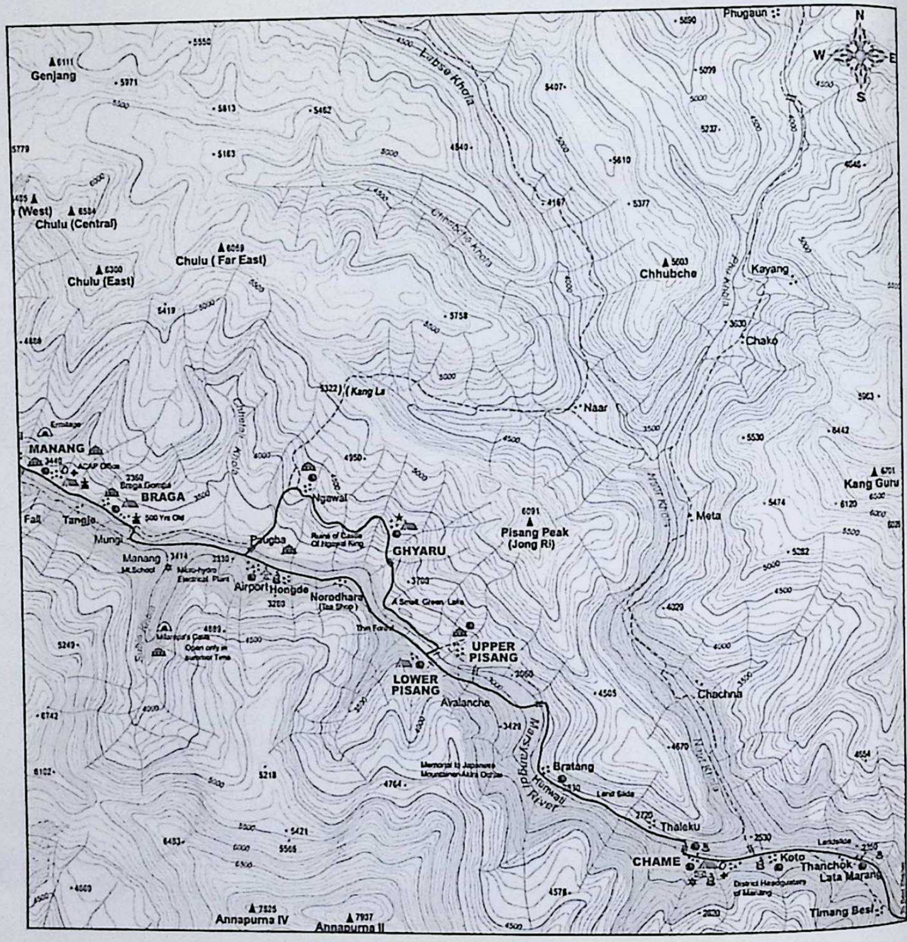


6

CHAPTER

Stories of Nar

Stories of Nar


Phugaun
N
W
E
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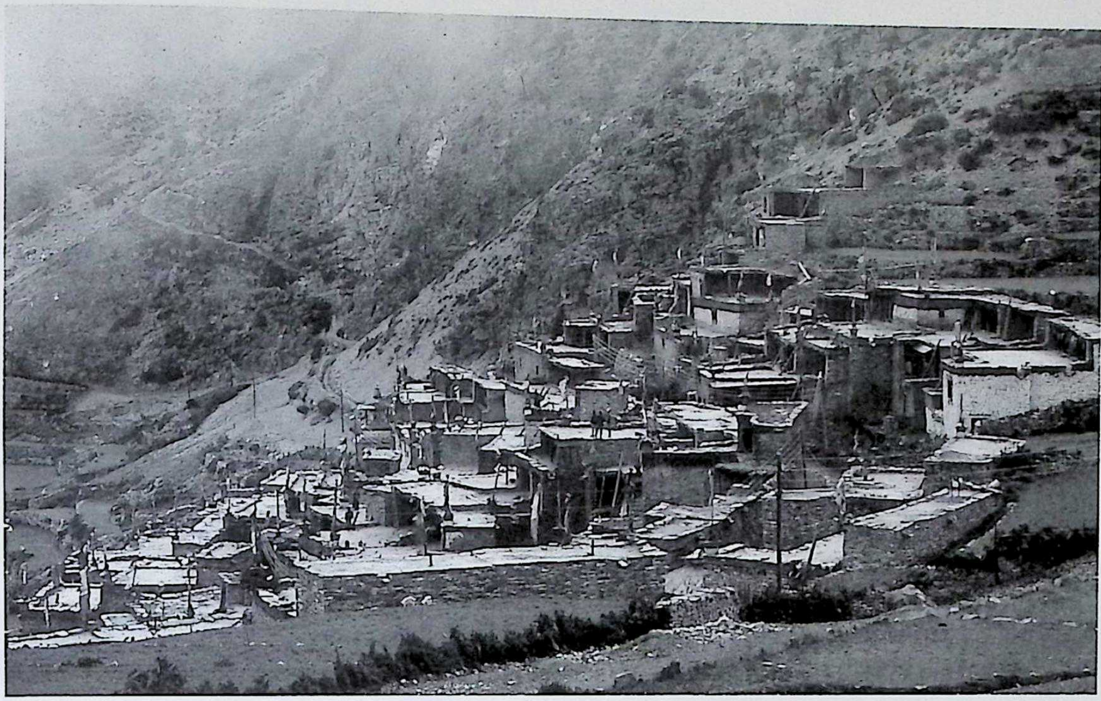
Labse Khola
Genjang
(West)
Chulu (Central)
Chulu (Far East)
Chulu (East)
Chhubche
Kayang
Phu Khola
Chako
(Kang La
Naar
Ermitage
MANANG
ACAP Office
Braga Gompa
BRAGA
Fall
Tangje
Mungi
Ngawal
Paugba
GHYARU
Pisang Peak
(Jong Ri)
Meta
Kang Guru
Nar Khola
Manang
Mt.School
Micro-hydro
Electrical Plant
Airport
Hongde
Norodhara
(Tea Shop)
A Small Green Lake
Thin Forest
Milarepa's Cave
Open only in summer Time
UPPER
PISANG
LOWER
PISANG
Avalanche
Chachna
Marsyangdi River
Bratang
Land Slide
Thaleku
CHAME
Koto
Thanchok
Lata Marang
District Headquarters of Manang
Timang Besi
Annapurna IV
Annapurna II

Nar is the most remote region of Manang District. It has of only two main villages, Nar and Phu. Nar is the only remaining area in Manang District with restricted aceess, and was only recently opened to a limited number of outside visitors each year.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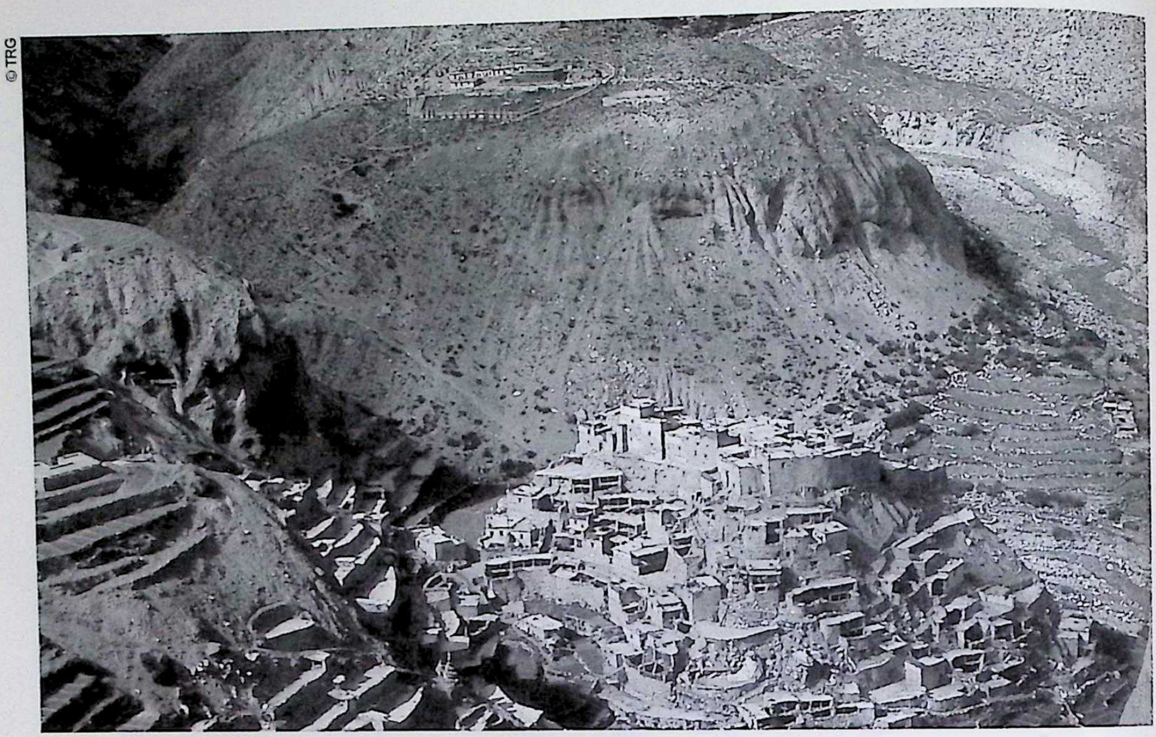
Nar Village is also called Chuprong. The name comes from *narsang* meaning 'the place of the blue sheep'. The villagers are known as *Nar-ten* and the village is located up the Nar Khola towards Kang-La Pass.

> Many generations ago a young hunter from Mustang wounded a blue sheep and tracked it over the mountains into the Nar Valley. He wondered if the land was suitable to farm, so he planted some barley from his pocket, vowing to settle there if it grew. He returned to Mustang but came back a year later and saw that the barley had ripened. So, he built the first settlement of Nar Village. He married a girl from Chaku, a place in Tibet, and many of her relatives migrated to Nar. They lived in the villages of Chgaku and Meta.

Phu is from phusang meaning 'the head of the valley' and is located up the Phu Khola. Villagers from Phu are *Phu-ten*. Both Nar Village and Phu are above the tree line and completely cut off during the snowy winter months.



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Residents of Phu live by herding yak and trading meat, wool and hides. In the summer they grow barley. During the long winter many travel to the middle hills of Nepal to trade. *Jimbu*, a high-altitude chive very popular in Nepali cooking, grows here.

The original Phu Village was a walled citadel a top a bluff. It had one thick wooden door, bolted shut at night against maravders from Tibet. In recent years, residents of Phu moved out of the old village and built more comfortable houses along the hillside. Residents move down to the lower and warner village of **Kyang** during the winter months.

Near Phu is **Tso Karnak**, a magic lake. Karnak means 'black and white'. The lake reflects the images of things, people, and places in dreams and wishes. *Phu-ten* used to prohibit outsiders from visiting the lake, believing that they would contaminate it and take away the precious stones and images found in it.

There is a story that early in the 1900s the Jumla Raja invaded Nar Valley with an army, after traveling up through Lamjung District. The Jumla soldiers killed all the inhabitants of **Chgaku** and **Meta** in a fierce battle. Seeing this, the villagers of Nar Village pleaded with their *lama* to save them from the same fate. It was winter so the *lama* caste a spell causing an avalanche to fall from the Kang Guru Mountain, blocking the path of the advancing army and killing many soldiers. This saved the people of Nar Village. In another story, disease killed the residents of Meta, and Nar Village only escaped the plague because it was so isolated.

The village ruins of Chgaku later became a khampa guerilla camp. Today, Chgaku is again deserted, but Meta is partially inhabited.

In Phu, there is a monastery constructed by Lama Urgen Lhundup Gyatso, also known as Lama Khyedu Karma Lopsang, called the **Tashi Lakhang**. In Buddhism, the number 108 symbolizes the completion of a cycle or blessing. Lama Lopsang constructed 108 *gompas* throughout the Himalaya and Tashi Lakhang, which means 'the blessed house of gods', was the 108th and last *gompa* he constructed. Tashi Lakhang eventually became the main *Kargyupa gompa* in Manang District and, along with the Braga Gompa and the Bodzo Gompa, is at the heart Ghale and Manangpa spiritual life.

© BW

Threshing grain

7

CHAPTER

Daily Life

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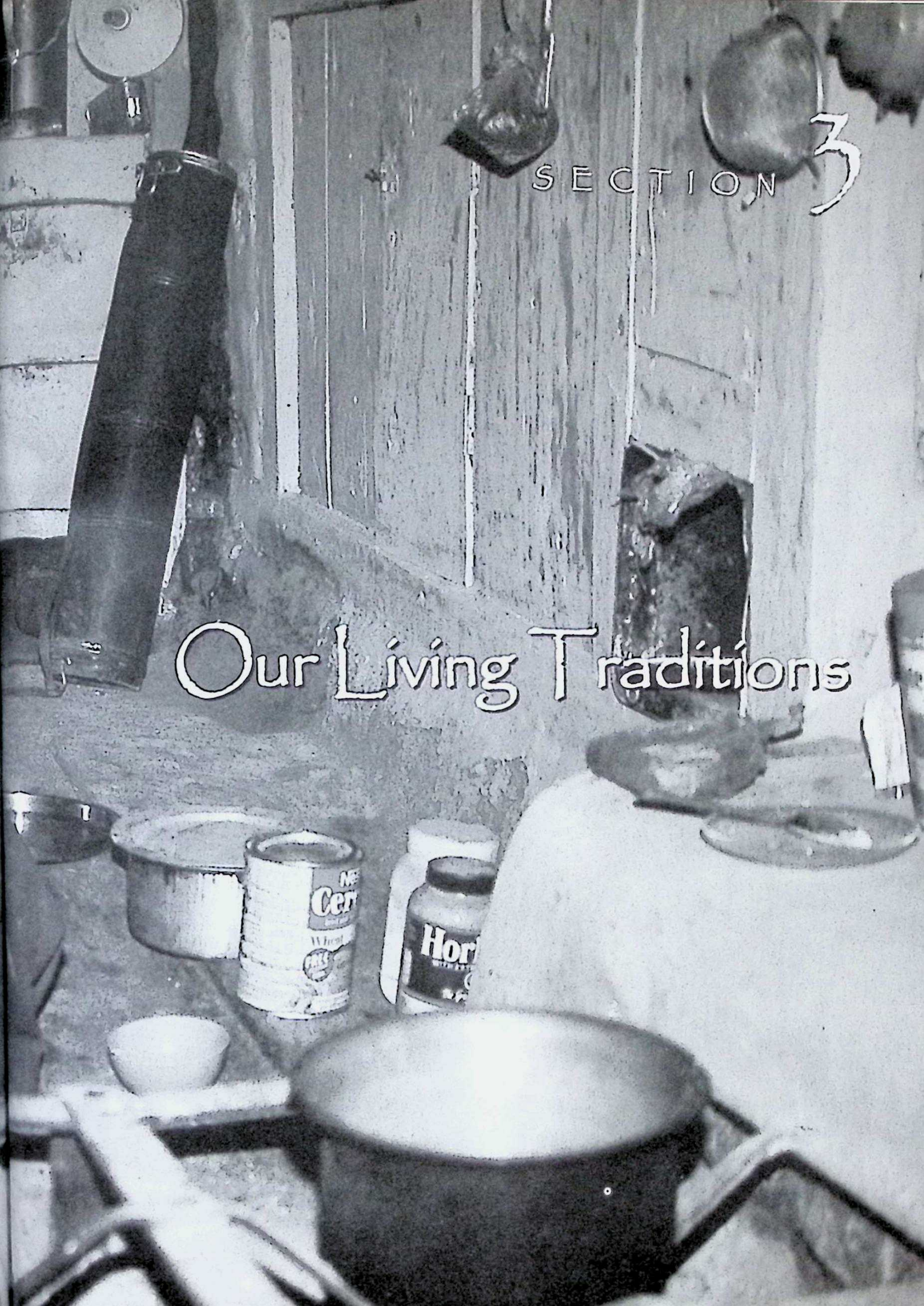
SECTION 3

Our Living Traditions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Daily Life

Our Occupations

Most of us are farmers, herders, and traders. In spring and fall, we sow and harvest crops and in summer, we tend to sheep, goats, and yaks in the high pastures. During the winter months, we travel for trading.

In lower Manang, the villagers traditionally were herders, who also farmed temporary fields slashed out of the forest. When the fields became on productive, they would slash out new fields in another place. They also hunted and gathered wild plants to supplement their livelihoods. Since the opening at the Annapurna circuit they make extra income from tourism and growing apples. At these lower elevations, the crops include wheat, buckwheat, millet, corn, chillies, and a variety of vegetables. The livestock include cows, water buffalo, sheep, goats, mules, chickens, zopkyo (cross between a yak and a cow), and pigs.

© TRG

Carding wool

In upper Manang, the harsh climate limits the number of crops in a year and their production. The main crops are potatoes, buckwheat, and barley, and the livestock includes goats, yaks, and horses. Large black Tibetan Mastiff dogs often guard the livestock.

The villagers graze their livestock in the lower pastures and fields during fall and winter. In the spring, the livestock cannot enter the villages after the fields have been sown. During the late spring and summer, the villagers keep livestock grazing in the high mountain pastures, bringing them down only at the beginning of harvest. In the fall, villagers herd sheep and goats down the Marsyangdi Gorge to towns and cities in time to sell them for the annual Hindu festival Dasain, in which families sacrifice the animals and feast on their meat.

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Weaving wool

In upper Manang, they can not grow enough to feed our families year-round, so the people of upper Manang have always engaged in bartering and trading to supplement their livelihoods. At first, the trading was limited to animal and medicinal plant products in exchange for rice and grains from other areas of Manang, Lamjung, and Mustang Districts.

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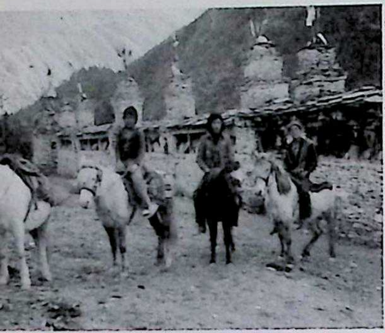
Traders transporting salt by yak

As trading increased, the men were gone more frequently and upper Manangpa women took over much of the responsibility for farming, herding, and other daily activities. We would not have survived if we had not done trading.

The Growth of Trading

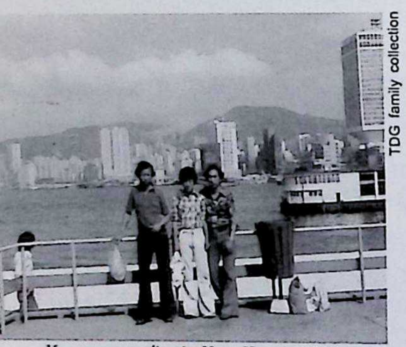
In 1743, Prithivi Narayan Shah became *raja* (king) of Gorkha District, east of Manang. In 1769, he conquered the Kathmandu Valley, a major step towards the unification of Nepal. Then in 1784, the Raja of Lamjung issued a royal edict giving the people of upper Manang their first documented trading privileges.

Some elders say the Lamjung Raja provided this agreeable trade status for assisting him in war against Prithivi Narayan Shah. Others say it was to ensure the continuous exchange of products between Manang and Lamjung, in recognition of their co-dependence. Still others believe it was reward for



TDG family collection

Young men leaving Pisang for trading in 1960s



TDG family collection

Young men trading in Hong Kong in 1960s

the skilful craftsmanship provided at the time of constructing the Lamjung *Durbar* (palace or fortress).[1]

Regardless of why, this edict reduced the taxes paid by the upper Manangpa to import and export goods it was a turning point after which they expanded their trading in the lower hills and plains of Nepal, in India, and eventually to Southeast Asia. Although their trading had been minimal until the late 1700s, the villagers of upper Manang had been paying hefty taxes each year.

The Manangpa have had to seek the reinstatement of their trade and tax privileges several times in the history of Nepal. The first time was in 1825, when King Rajendra reconfirmed Manang was to remain tax-free as long as it paid a fixed yearly tax to his government. Three times during the reign of the Rana prime ministers, the Manangpa sent requests for expired tax exemptions to continue. The Ranas always granted these requests but sometimes on the condition of paying a fixed annual tax.

> Today, members of most families in Manang have traveled to other countries. In the beginning, we exported only herbs, herbal medicines, and musk to Assam in India and Burma, where we began to sell semiprecious stones.
>
> Some of our grandfathers still tell stories of selling gems to American soldiers during the occupation of Burma at the end of World War II. Eventually, we sold other, more profitable items, like gold. Our trade expanded to Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and other Southeast Asian countries. Then, suddenly, King Tribhuvan cancelled our tax-free status. It was a very difficult time for us.

The Manangpa regained tax exemption as part of the agreement with King Tribhuvan's son, King Mahendra, in return for disarming after the Tibetan Khampa fighters left Manang. (See Section Two for more details.) The agreement also included being allowed to obtain official citizenship papers and passports for trade and travel.

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[1] Today, the Lamjung Durbar is the main historical site in Lamjung District, perched on the west ridge above the district headquarters, Besisahar. The durbar was built in the early 1500s when Hindus from the plains of India were settling in the Himalayan foothills as refugees from Muslim invaders. Those who entered Lamjung fought with the ethnic Ghale Gurungs for control. These Hindu immigrants traveled into the middle hills of Nepal, having a profound effect on the society and culture and bringing with them the precursor of the modern Nepali language and the cultivation of irrigated rice. The Lamjung Durbar is now a school. Ranas ruled Nepal autocratically to approximatelly 100 years until 1951.

The Manangpa were the first community to obtain these documents and it helped to transform many traders into wealthy businessmen. Starting in the 1960s, the poeple of Manang would travel from their remote mountain valley to trade in the big cities of Asia.

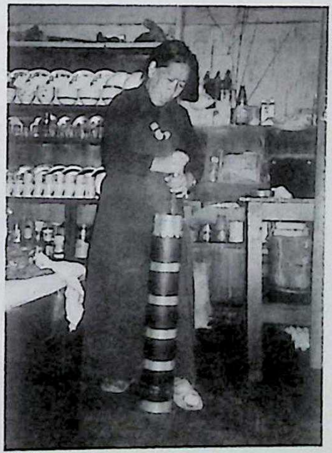
Food

The most common foods eaten are the crops grown at the various elevations of villages in Manang. In lower Manang, people mostly eat *daal bhat,* the traditional 'lentils and rice' with vegetables, meat, and spicy *achar* (pickle) of the middle hills of Nepal. At higher elevations, the Manangpa eat *tsampa* and butter tea.

With the arrival of more travelers and the import of different varieties of grain, rice, and vegetables, *daal bhat* has become more popular higher up into Manang.

Rice is not grown in Manang and it has always been a commodity bought or bartered and carried up to Manang. People in lower Manang eat more rice because it does not have to be carried as far. Until recently in upper Manang, rice was only eaten on special occasions.

> We eat a lot of potatoes, buckwheat, and barley. We make these into foods similar to what Tibetans eat, especially *tsampa*, which is roasted barley flour eaten with butter tea.
>
> Butter tea is a favourite, made with salt, hot black tea, and butter, mixed together in a long wooden churn called a *chedang*. In all the villages with Tibetan culture, people enjoy butter tea. It keeps us strong and healthy in the high mountains especially during cold weather. It probably tastes more like soup to foreigners.



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Making butter tea

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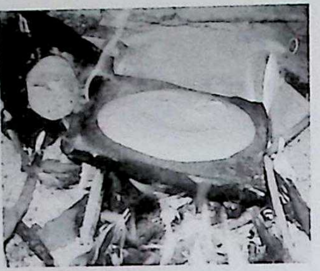

Kyapra ken is buckwheat and water worked in a pot until it looks like a log. We enjoy it with dried vegetable curry or hot, spicy *achar*. We mostly eat *kyapra kyang* (buckwheat pancakes) with radish *achar* mixed with different herbs and spices. *Aloo bhat* (potato rice) is also popular, made by mashing rice and potatoes cooked together with a spoonful of butter. *Aloo polla* is potatoes with chopped dry yak meat, red chillies, and salt. We mostly eat it as a snack.

Cholba is a salad of buckwheat leaves mixed with yogurt, chilly powder, and salt.

Bhagdul is small balls of dough made of *tsampa*, sugar, and *ghee* (clarified butter). First, we boil the balls and then we fry them. This food is mostly prepared during Nyungne, as a special food for the devotees on the days when they can eat. We also eat them on Lhosar and special occasions.

Khurba is a chapatti fried in oil. In the past, *khurba* were prepared for weddings. When the bride goes to her own family's house the first time after the wedding, there is a tradition of giving *khurba* to her family as a gift from the groom's house.

Tarragon, thyme, sage, garlic, chamomile, and wild cranberries grow wild in Manang. *Jimbu*, a high altitude chive that is dried and used as seasoning, grows in Nar. With the recent influx of tourists, Manang has also become famous for its apple pie, pastries, and apple brandy.

Houses

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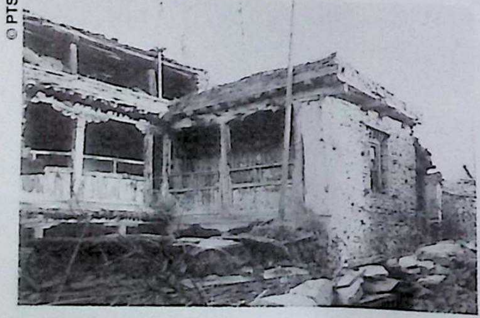
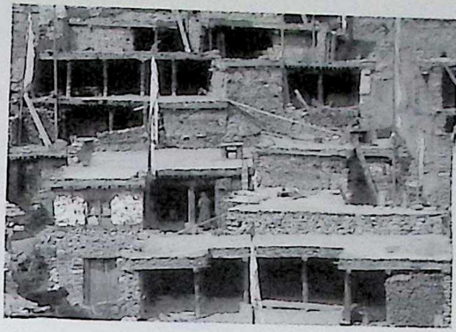


In lower Manang, the ethnic Gurungs used to make their village houses round, although now they make them rectangular. Most houses in lower Manang have a porch on the front and sides, often enclosed. Kitchens are in the centre of the house and the focus of most activity. The sleeping quarters are often above the animal barns for warmth. The people of lower Manang construct their houses from a wide range of materials, but mostly of mud brick and wood. The roofs may be made of thatch, corrugated aluminium, wood, or slate.



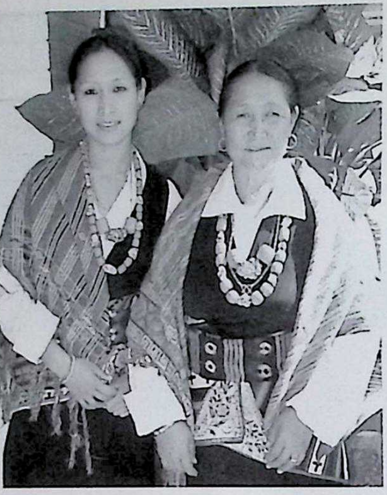
At higher elevations and further north, the pitch of the roofs changes from being sloped to being flat since there is so little rain or snowfall. Instead of porches, the Manangpa have inner courtyards that are protected from the wind. The houses are constructed of stone collected from the riverbanks with wooden doors and window frames. Tyala shaal, a technique to make pressed earthen bricks, is sometimes used for its strength and durability. Many of the ancient ruins seen in upper Manang were made this way.

The people of upper Manang and Nar traditionally built their houses clustered together as protection from both their enemies and the weather. The houses and villages are built to receive the most sunlight and the least wind. The flat roofs in upper Manang are used to store firewood, hay, and to dry food grains.

> Houses in (upper) Manang have two levels. We keep our livestock on the lower level and our living space and 'prayer room', called *tsekang,* on the upper level. The cooking area is in a corner of the living space. We use ladders carved out of a single log to get from one level to the next. We make our doorways very low because *rolang* (dead spirits or skeletal ghosts) cannot bend over. These short doors protect us from being haunted. Before we used to have very few windows but now people are building taller houses with bigger doors and windows with glass panes.

Clothing and Jewellery

> Many years ago, our ancestors traded for wool that came from Tibet. After washing and cleaning it, we spun the wool into yarn for weaving cloth to make clothes, mats, blankets, and other personal items. It is still common for *anyis* (young, unmarried women) to gather in the evenings after finishing their daily work and spin wool together. They do this while singing and making jokes. We call these spinning friends *shra-row* because they are the same age. The spinning wheel used by women is called a



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thong, while men use a longer and bigger *kortong* with extra crossed wood in the middle.

We call the robe worn by Manangpa a *koen*, or *chuba* in Tibetan. It is bound around the waist by a long sash called *phaki*. Women wear a *koen* down to their ankles. Men also wear a *koen*, but they pull it up to be just below their knees. In the winter, we wear *pey koen*, or woollen *koen*.

We wear coral and turquoise jewellery, probably because our ancestors came from Tibet. Nowadays, many people set their jewellery in gold. A *gurnya* is a short necklace with a big turquoise piece in the middle and two smaller matching coral pieces. Mostly, married or elder women wear *gurnya* all the time.

Another necklace is called *peerukanda*, made of turquoise, coral, and gold. We wear this long necklace only on special occasions like weddings and festivals, along with 'gold bangles' called *putul*, and a gold chain if we have one. Wearing jewellery is especially important at weddings. Each bride is given a set of jewellery including bangles, *gurnya*, earrings, and a pendant. Poor families who cannot afford expensive jewellery do not always follow this tradition.

Mythical Beings

Metyelat Atabha, meaning 'not supposed to take a name', is a mythical being, a cripple, who stands about two feet tall.

He is not like an ordinary human being. He only has one real leg and uses a wooden leg. People believe he is from a different planet. He only travels around after midnight and is rarely seen — but he can see us. You can know if he is nearby because his feces are green and he smells like old eggs. His hair is always oily.

If you happen to catch Metyelat Atabha, steal his wooden leg, and place it high on a top shelf where he cannot reach it, or if you provide him with shelter in your home, Metyelat will make your family rich. Hoping to get his leg back, he will steal *tsampa*, *ghee*, buckwheat, and other foods from rich families to please you.

8

CHAPTER

Ceremonies and Rituals

Ceremonies and Rituals

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Births

We mostly give birth at home, sometimes by ourselves and sometimes with the help of our female relatives or the midwife. When a new baby is born, all our friends and relatives pay a visit to see the child. They bring bottles of beer, soft drinks, juice, and fruit. They also give the new parents money in an envelope. Some bring gifts for the baby such as clothes or toys. The parents offer their visitors *maltah* that is made of rice flour, dried cheese, *ghee*, sugar, and salt. We eat it only on special occasions like weddings and festivals. After a month, we visit the *lama* (priest) at the monastery. He cuts off a little of the baby's hair and gives the baby a name.

Coming of Age

In upper Manang, when a boy turns fourteen, we do a coming of age ceremony for him. As the part of the ceremony he has to make and eat balls of *tsampa* and *ghee*. Thereafter, he is considered a man and begins to take part in adult social functions.

Fifteen-year-old girls brew local wheat beer, called *chang*, which they present to the young men of the village in the hopes that they will remember and protect them from abduction and marriage to men from neighbouring villages.

Weddings

TDG family collection

> For many generations, we have practiced a system of marriage between our first cousins. For example, it is common for a man to marry his maternal uncle's daughter and a woman to marry her paternal aunt's son. Forbidden is marriage between couples of the same *phopey* (paternal sub-clan).

Today, this system of cousin marriage and even marriages only between Manangpa is slowly disappearing especially as more and more Manangpa settle in Pokhara, Kathmandu, elsewhere in Asia, and around the world.

> Nowadays, if a boy and a girl like each other, they seek engagement and marriage when they think it is right. The most common age to get married is eighteen, the age when we are free to choose our own partner. Most widows remarry after consulting the village elders.

Manangpa brides are usually older than their grooms are and many families prefer 'plump' girls, who are assumed to be in good health and strong.

Traditionally, the boy's parents first approach the girl's parents with a marriage proposal. The girl's parents then consult with their close friends and relatives to discuss the proposal. If the proposal is accepted, both sets of parents meet to share drinks and decide on the time to announce the engagement and the day to hold the wedding. In the past, it was common for the engagement and the wedding to be years apart.

If the marriage proposal is rejected, the boy's family will often approach the girl's family again and ask them to reconsider. In the past, the boy's family would sometimes seal the engagement by abducting the girl and placing *ghee* on her head. The boy could then claim her as his bride without

TDG family collection

family approval. Today, an unwilling girl has the right to refuse to marry her abductor. There is even a steep fine for the boy's family if they do an unsolicited or undesired abduction.

> The day the engagement is announced, the girl is sent away from her family home to be with her friends so she will not hear the talk about her forthcoming marriage. Her friends, rather than her family, then tell her about her engagement. This is a polite way to overcome embarrassment and sadness in front of her future in-laws for when a girl marries she must leave her childhood home to live with her husband's family. The date of the wedding is kept secret from her until just before the ceremony.
>
> If the engagement is broken after the engagement announcement, the girl's parents pay a penalty. This can be as high as Rs. 10,000. The girl's parents also pay a penalty of up to Rs. 100,000 if the couple divorce. We used to pay these fines by giving the boy's parents a yak or a horse or even some sheep, but now it is paid mostly in cash.

Several days before the marriage ceremony, the groom and his male friends kidnap the bride as a symbolic gesture to seal the union. This happens at night. It is up to the unmarried women of the village to try to prevent the kidnapping.

> The groom's friends offer us girls cash bribes to allow him to succeed. When he catches his bride, the groom carries her away on horseback into the forest or high up into the mountains where her family cannot find her. She remains there until her parent's formally accept an offering of alcohol, *khata ghee*, and money from the groom.
>
> Just before the wedding, our *lama* conducts a *puja* at the groom's house to drive away all the evil spirits that may come with the bride. Then, a male relative of the groom collects the bride and carries her to her new home.
>
> When the new bride arrives, her mother-in-law hides outside the house behind the door until she has gone inside. Only then does the mother-in-law re-enter the house. This is because the power of the new bride is so high it might shorten the life of her

mother-in-law. Also, if the bride goes first into her new home, we believe the marriage will be successful, bringing peace and good fortune to the family.

The night of the wedding, all the unmarried men and women of the village sing and dance on the roof of the groom's house, throwing a *khata*down the chimney at the newlyweds. The bride and groom wrap money into the *kattha,* which is pulled back up by the singers as payment for their musical entertainment. Drinking, eating, singing, and dancing continue throughout the night.

After the wedding, the bride returns to her *nyenthey* (maternal home), taking gifts of *khurba* (deep fried Tibetan bread), *phi* (rice wine), and *arak* (alcohol) from the groom's family.

The bride must carry two baskets full of *khurba* for her sisters, brothers, aunts, and uncles. The reason we offer *khurba* is that in the mountains any food that is fried and buttery is good and helps to keep us warm. And of course, making the in-laws happy is the key to a successful marriage!

Funerals

When someone dies, we call the *lama* to the house to perform a *puja* called *Phowa.* The *lama* must be experienced and well practiced. During the *puja,* he joins his force with the deceased person's soul to encourage good and positive energy.

There are then three ways to let go of the deceased. The first is cremation, the most common practice in Manang today. The second is to cut the body into pieces and feed it to the vultures, which we hardly do anymore. The third is to cut the body into pieces and throw it into the river for the fish. These three methods, symbolize the three elements of fire, sky, and water.

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The body heat of the deceased may leave from the feet, hands, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, or the top of the head. The spirit follows in the direction of the heat. If the spirit leaves from the mouth or the back, it will have a bad life when it is reborn. If it departs from the nose or eyes, it may be reborn as either an animal or a human. If it departs from the head, then it will go to *Dewachen*, or the place 'full of love' (heaven). This is why the *lama* pulls on the head of the deceased while praying, to encourage the spirit to leave the body this way.

After conducting Phowa, a special *puja* called *Tongje* is done. In this, 1,100 butter lamps are lit and 1,100 *tsog* (offerings) are given. From one to five Tongje are performed depending on the family finances

The body of the deceased is kept for three days or longer because a body should not be cremated on a Saturday, Sunday, or a date with the numeral 8 in it. The *lama* washes the body before cremation and does *Shitro* (another prayer). We use special *torma* and *tsog*. Then we take the body to the *gompa* for cremation. The senior *lama* puts *ringha* (round crown) on the head of the deceased and walks around the body doing *cham*, a masked dance, to drive away evil and lead the spirit to the afterlife. The *lama* offers different grains and herbs to the body and then lights the funeral pyre. The ashes are later thrown into holy water, such as a river or lake.

Every day for six days after the death, the family burns paper with the dead person's name written on it. On the seventh day, they burn all the remaining pictures and papers with the deceased's name or image. For 49 days, the family members place *sur* (burnt wheat powder) on the hearth fire and offer *sey ngorba* or food offerings to the spirit up to three times a day. The *lama* reads *Pecha,* the Buddhist religious texts. They hire a *lama* to do *Partutheytol,* every day for 49 days to help guide the spirit along the path to heaven. He also offers *sey ngorba*. On the 49th day, the lama reads a very special and final prayer called *Molam*.

When someone who has no family dies, either we cremate them or the *lama* cuts their body into pieces and throws them into the river. This depends on the amount of money collected by the *lama* for their funeral from other villagers.

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9

CHAPTER

Festivals

Festivals

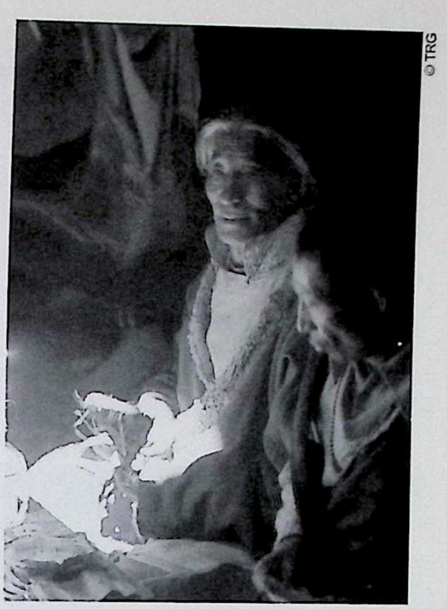
The dates for the festivals of Manang, as elsewhere in Nepal, are determined astrologically and seasonally, making it difficult to say exactly when in the Western calendar they may occur.

> **Dwa Tangba Lhosar** is the special New Year for the people of Nyeshang and Nar. During the New Year, everyone eats good food. Early in the morning, we eat *maltah*, which is made of rice flour, butter, and sugar. In Manang rice, sugar and *ghee* are rare imported goods that we cannot eat every day.

Lhosar is Tibetan New Year and falls in February. Manangpas celebrate Lhosar because they practise Tibetan Buddhism.

Metha, or Dhachang, is the archery festival celebrated both in upper and lower Manang. *Dha* means 'arrow' while *chang* means 'beer'. This festival takes place during the third month of the Tibetan calendar, in April or May. It is a way for the young men to honour their warrior ancestors who had to be adept in using the bow and arrow for both hunting and fighting enemies. Almost every village in upper Manang celebrates Metha, although with slight variations. *Lamas* pick the most auspicious date and time for the festival.

The district archery competition in Chame is a large event occurring simultaneously with a *puja* called *La Tsen*. Every household contributes rice towards the festival and two appointed 'sponsors' from the village to make the mandatory rice wine. On the first day of the festival a *lama* from Mandha called the Lapen Lama arrives. The Lapen Lama comes from a long line of *lamas* with exclusive authority to conduct La Tsen. When he arrives he directs the *puja* to a juniper tree representing a deity.



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> On the second day, called Dhopata, we perform *pujas* in our homes to drive away any evil spirits. Our ancestors used to sacrifice a rooster on this day. Then on the third and fourth days, the archery competition happens at the Chame school compound. In other villages, it is on a large open field. We fix a big plank of wood at the end of the field and the *lama* draws a picture of a male and female demon to put on it.
>
> Young and old men participate in the archery competition and women cheer them from the sides holding juniper branches in their hands. The archers aim their arrows at the demons and the one who hits the demon squarely wins a prize of money. The winner is the hero of our village until the next Metha. Then, we spend the evening celebrating with ample food, drink, dancing, and singing.
>
> On the fifth day, called Yang Khangje, we appoint the sponsors for the next year's Metha. The remaining two days are for prayers.

Dawa Shepa, called Buddha Jayanti elsewhere in Nepal, is the celebration of Buddha's birthday during the fifth month of the Tibetan calendar in May or June.

> For Dawa Shepa we gather in the center of the village. Young people carry *Dukchhe*, our holy book of Lord Buddha, while the *lamas* beat drums, blow conch shells, and chant *mantras* while circling the village. This lasts all day to ensure we have a bountiful harvest in the fall.

Nyungne is a special prayer the Manangpa have conducted annually for the past 10-12 years to Chenrezig (the deity of compassion). It is during the fourth month of the Tibetan calendar in

© TRG

Nyungne prayers in Braga gompa

about June. Nyungne brings together many Manangpa monks, nuns, and religious practitioners at the Manang Gompa at Swyambunath in Kathmandu.

The prayers last for 16 days with eight repetitions. During each two-day repetition, the participants eat only one meal in mid-afternoon on the first and then only liquid until they sleep. From day two until the start of the second repetition, they cannot eat or drink. Being able to complete all of the repetitions depends on one's health, time, and financial capacity. In the villages, often only four repetitions are done to allow for the necessary work in the fields.

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Yartung is the horse racing festival beginning on the third day of the fifth month of the Tibetan calendar, or the full moon of August. Yartung celebrates, among other things, the return of horses and other livestock from the high pastures where they have spent the summer grazing. Festivities occur on the largest open ground of each village.

Our ancestors began Yartung so the people from different villages could get to know each other better. While other villages celebrate it independently, Braga and Manang Village still celebrate together. They meet at Tha Tip Thang, a big field between these two villages. We wear our best clothes and jewellery. Men arrive on foot while women ride horseback. During the races, women sit on the sides cheering the men on. The winner must be both the fastest horse racer and pick up the most *khata* from the ground. After the race is won, we visit the Bhojo Gompa and the Kargyu Gompa to light butter lamps. The full moon helps us to feast, sing, and dance all night.

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Phenei is a horse racing fair only in Pisang. The racers are unmarried man, and the competition occurs in early October.

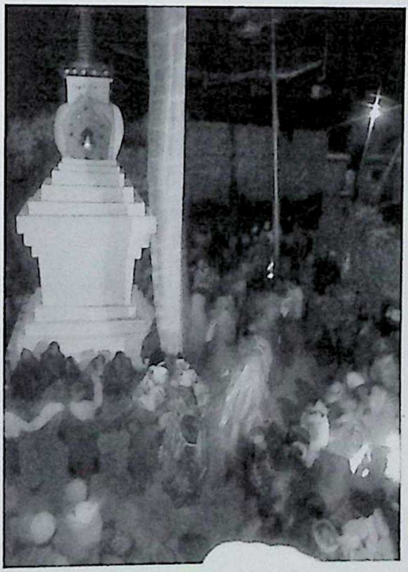
The **Krishi Mela** is a festival and agricultural exhibition held every fall in Chame, the district headquarters. Farmers from throughout Manang bring their best vegetables, fruits, and grains for judging. Winners take home generous awards.

Padhe is celebrated only once in three years (October 2001, 2004, 2007). It is an enactment of oral tradition through drama, recalling the moment of victory in a territorial war between two brothers.

Male actors dress up and play the parts of kings, ministers, shepherds, and soldiers. The soldiers begin the performance by assembling in a group led by a flag carrier and followed by villagers playing a *narshing* (kind of musical instrument). At the conclusion of the performance, women provide the actors with *khata* and *arak.* Many of the costumes, weapons, and musical instruments used during the drama are stored in the Braga Gompa.

> Long ago, our ancestors would inaugurate Padhe by sacrificing twelve virgin girls. Later, this became twelve goats. After we became Buddhists, we could no longer kill animals and so today, we cut the ears of twelve goats instead.

Padhe began many years ago in Ngawal, but became so popular it was adopted by villagers in Khangsar, then Braga, and more recently in Manang Village.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Tarkya is done every three years immediately after Padhe, in early winter after the harvest and when heavy snows blanket the ground. Tarkya drives away evil spirits. Only Ngawal carries on the tradition, although Braga also used to celebrate it.

Lamas inaugurate the festival by performing a *puja*, playing conch shells, chanting *mantras*, and dancing. They make *lee*, the special *torma* of the devil, after collecting *tsampa* flour from each household.. It is common for young men to carry deer, yak, or sheep horns, while they tease and flirt with the young women.

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When the *lee* is ready, we gather in a big circle on the open ground around the *lamas*. They try to escape from the circle and to reach the Lakhang Kye (sacred place) where the *lee torma* is. We keep them in the circle to prevent them from reaching Lakhang Kye.

If the *lama* escapes from the circle and reaches *Lakhang Kye*, one village man has to carry him on his back while he tills a section of field. However, if we catch the *lama* before he reaches *Lakhang Kye*, he has to carry the man who caught him on his back. At the end of the game, we burn the *Lee torma* (symbolizing the destruction of evil spirits). The *lamas* bless all of us and we enjoy drinking *arak* together.

In lower Manang, many people celebrate some Hindu festivals including:

- **Shiva Ratri,** the night of Lord Shiva, in February;
- **Holi** or Phagu Purnima, the festival of colors, and **Chaitra Dasain** or Ram Nawami, a pre-Dasain festival, in March;
- **Krishna Janman Astami,** Lord Krishna's birthday, **Indra Jatra,** festival for the rain god, **Gai Jatra,** festival of the cow, and **Teej,** women's festival, in September;
- **Dasain,** festival marking Ram's victory over Ravan, as well as blessings to the goddess Durga, in October; and
- **Tihar,** the festival of lights for Laxmi, Goddess of wealth, in November.

Upper Manang Calender of Events

January	**DwaTangba Lhosar,** Manangpa New Year.
February	**Lhosar,** Tibetan New Year. Young women, who have gone to neighboring districts to buy rice and trade supplies, return home.
March	Male traders, who travelled outside of Manang over the winter, return home.
April	**Metha,** archery festival.
May	**Dawa Shepa,** Buddha's birthday. Potato planting starts.
June	**Nyungne,** prayers for Chenrezig. Wheat, barley, and buckwheat planting starts.
July	**Yartung,** horse-racing festival.
August	Women from Pisang visit the cave Niebe, and celebrate with traditional dancers.
September	**Krishi Mela,** harvest festival. (Harvest month is called Thangay.)
October	**Phenei,** horse-racing festival in Pisang. **Padhe,** drama festival held every three years. **Tarkya,** follows Padhe to drive away evil spirits.
November	Young man and women prepare to leave for trading
December	Many people from upper Manang travel south to escape the cold.

NOTE: Villages in Manang do not always conduct events at the same time. There may be a difference of as many as twenty to thirty days.

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Glossary

Note: Abbreviations in the brackets indicate the language(s) of the particular word.

Nep. –Nepali

Nye. – Nyeshangte (language of upper Manang)

Tib. – Tibetan

Gur. – Gurung language of middle hills people

Skt. – Ancient language of India in which most early Buddhist texts were written

Aama (Nep., Nye.) – mother.

Achar (Nep.) – spicy pickle.

Akhay (Nye.) – grandfather or respectful way of addressing old man.

Akhay Kai Du (Nye.) – old grandfather rock.

Aloo Bhat (Nep.) – potato rice.

Aloo Polla (Nep.) – potato with dried yak meat, red chillies, and salt.

Amitabha Buddha – Buddha of Infinite Light. Also known as **Opame**.

Ani (Nye., Tib.) – celibate Buddhist nun.

Anyi (Nye.) – young, unmarried woman.

Arak (Tib., Nye.) – distilled alcoholic drink.

Atisha – learned monk and teacher from India who started the resurgence of Buddhism in Tibet in 1042.

Avalokiteshvara (Skt.) – deity of Compassion, or the Bodhisattva personifying the compassion of the **Buddhas**. Also known as **Phakpa Chenrezig** and **Chenrezig** (Tib.), or **Lokeshvara**.

Besi (Nep.) – place at the bottom of a hill.

Bhagdul (Nye.) – balls of **tsampa**, sugar, and ghee.

Bhaje (Nep.) – grandfather or old man.

Bhata (Nep.) – washing bowl.

Bhotiya (Nep.) – highland people from Bhot, or the border areas of the Himalaya including Tibet.

Bodhisattva (Skt.) – one of three kinds of beings or depictions: 1. A being who through compassion strives to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings. 2. One who has attained one of the levels of realization on the path to becoming a **Buddha**. 3. A sublime personification of a particular quality of enlightenment, such as compassion, wisdom, or spiritual power, in order to inspire that quality in others.

Bra (Nye.) – cliff.

Brag-tay (Nye.) – people from the village of **Braga**, in the region of **Nyeshang**.

Buddha (Skt.) – an enlightened being, who understands the true nature of reality – ultimate emptiness and relative interconnectedness. Also known as the 'Fully Awakened One', and a being who has removed emotional and cognitive veils and is endowed with all enlightened qualities of realization. A Buddha has wisdom compassion, and spiritual power. The historical **Shakyamuni Buddha** lived over 2500 years ago in what is now Nepal and India.

Cham (Tib.) – Buddhist masked dance.

Chame-tay (Nye.) – people from the village of Chame. Literally means the people who sit in Chame.

Chana Dorje (Tib.) – Bodhisattva of Spiritual Power. Also known as **Vajrapani** (Skt.).

Chang (Tib., Nye.) – local wheat or barley beer.

Chapatti (Nep.) – thin round wheat bread cooked in a pan.

Chauri (Nep.) – yak crossbreed with a cow. Also known as **Zopkyo** (Tib.).

Chedang (Nye., Tib.) – long wooden churn.

Chenrezig (Tib.) – deity of Compassion, or the Bodhisattva personifying the compassion of the **Buddhas**. Also known as **Phakpa Chenrezig, Avalokiteshvara**, or **Lokeshvara** in Sanskrit. His Holiness the **Dalai Lama** is regarded as an incarnation of Chenrezig.

Cho (Nye.) – high plateau.

Chokyong (Tib.) – four compass directions. Also known as **Lokpala** (Skt.).

Cholba(Nye) – buckwheat salad.

Chomey (Nye., Tib.) – butter lamp.

Chorten (Tib., Nye.) – Buddhist monument symbolizing the Buddha's enlightenment. Also known as **Stupa** (Skt.). Stupas are the most typical Buddhist monuments and are found in a variety of forms in all Buddhist countries. They often contain the relics of enlightened beings or lamas.

Chyachyal (Nye) – prostration.

Dhal Bhat (Nep.) – lentils and rice.

Dalai Lama – His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people of the **Gelukpa** sect, and leader of the Tibetan people in exile. His Holiness is regarded as an incarnation of **Chenrezig**, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

Danda (Nep.) – hill or ridge.

Deity (Tib.- **Lha**, Skt.- **Deva**) – this term designates a Buddha, dharma protector, or personification of an aspect of enlightenment, such as Chenrezig.

Dha (Tib.) – arrow.

Dhachang (Tib.) – archery festival. Also called **Metha** (Nye.).

Dhak (Nye.) – cliff.

Dharma (Skt.) – religious practices. Also used to indicate the teachings of the **Buddha**.

Dhozum (Nye.) – person chosen to serve for a year enforcing village livestock and crop rules in Manang.

Dhukure (Nep.) – dove.

Doko (Nep.) – type of basket to carry grains or goods.

Dolma (Tib.) – **Bodhisattva** who symbolizes purity and fertility and protects the people of Tibet. Also known as Tara.

Dorje (Tib.) – thunderbolt or diamond, symbolic or indestructibility and used to represent skillful means of compassion. Used in conjunction with a **Trilbu** that symbolizes the wisdom of emptiness. Also known as **Vajra** (Skt.).

Dhakarpo (Tib.) – white cliff place.

Dudh (Nep.) – milk or milky.

Dukchhe (Tib.) – book of **Shakyamuni Buddha**.

Durbar (Nep.) – fortress or palace.

Dzogchen Nyingthik (Tib.) – teachings of **Guru Rinpoche**.

Dzong (Nye.) – fortress or citadel.

Enlightenment – the state of purification of all obscurations and realization of all qualities such as wisdom and compassion.

Ga (Nye.) – himal, snow peak.

Gain (Nye.) – to stick to something.

Gaon (Nep.) – village.

Gelukpa (Tib.) – sect of Tibetan Buddhism started by Lama Tsong Khapa in the 1400s. The **Dalai Lama** is the spiritual head of the Gelukpa sect, and leader of the Tibetan people in exile.

Ghee (Nep.) – clarified butter.

Ghyar-tay (Nye.) – people from the village of **Ghyaru**, in the region of **Nyeshang**.

Gompa (Nep., Nye) – Buddhist temple in a village or monastery.

Gonpo (Tib.) – principal protector deity.

Gothala (Nep.) – herder.

Gupha (Nep.) – cave.

Gurnya (Nye.) – short necklace with a big turquoise piece in the middle and matching smaller coral pieces on each side.

Guru Rinpoche – established Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century, and developed **Vajrayana Buddhism**. Also known as **Ogyen Rinpoche** and **Padmasambhava** (Skt.), which literally means lotus-born.

Guru (Skt.) – teacher or mentor.

Gya (Nye.) – vast or large.

Gyasumdo (Nye.) – region of lower Manang. Literally means the meeting point of three trials.

Gyasumdo-ten (Nye.) – people from the region of Gyasumdo. Literally to 'sit' in Gyasumdo.

Gya-Tso (Nye.) – lake in upper Manang. Literally means vast lake.

Hayagriva (Skt.) – wrathful manifestation of **Avalokiteshvara**. Also known as **Tamdrin**.(Tib.).

Himal (Nep., Skt.) – snow-capped mountain.

Himalaya (Nep., Skt.) – place of the Himals.

Hinayana (Skt.) – fundamental teachings of Buddhist thought and practice; one of three paths of Buddhism practiced primarily in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and other places. The motivation of Hinayana is generally for one's own liberation. The other two paths are **Mahayana** and **Vajrayana**.

Homa (Tib.) – milk.

Jampa (Tib.) – Future Buddha, who exists as a **Bodhisattva** until he can return as a simple human and become a **Buddha**, 4000 years after the death of the historical **Shakyamuni Buddha**. Also known as the **Maitreya Buddha**.

Jampelyang (Tib.) – **Bodhisattva** of Wisdom, or a personification of the wisdom of all the Buddhas. Also known as **Manjushri**, the first divine teacher of Buddhist.

Jimbu (Nep.) – high altitude chive very popular in Nepali cooking.

Ka (Nye.) – white.

Kargyupa (Tib.) – sect of Tibetan Buddhism practiced by most people in Manang. It was started in 1042 AD by the teacher Atisha.

Kagyur (Tib.) – books of direct teachings of **Shakyamuni Buddha**.

Karnak/Karbo Narbo (Tib.) – black and white.

Karpo (Tib.) – white **torma**.

Kasturi (Nep.) – musk deer.

Khampas (Tib.) – armed warriors from the Tibetan region of Kham, who fought the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

Kharka (Nep.) – meadow or pasture.

Khata (Tib.) – ceremonial scarf, usually white or yellow, made of cotton or silk, that is offered to a lama at the beginning or end of most Tibetan Buddhist rituals, or presented to a person on an auspicious occaision.

Khola (Nep.) – river.

Khurba (Nye.) – **chapatti** of Tibetan bread fried in **ghee**.

Khy (Nye.) – clan following one's father's lineage.

Khyenpa (Tib.) – wisdom. Also known as **Bidan** (Nep.).

Koen (Nye.) – long robe worn by men (knee level) and women (ankle level). Also known as **chuba** (Tib.).

Koma (Nye., Tib) – a wild plant only found in the forest, which gives red color when boiled.

Kora (Nye., Tib.) – pilgrimage route lined with prayer wheels. Literally means circumambulation or circle.

Kortang (Nye.) – Spinning wheel used by men.

Krishi Mela (Nep.) – agricultural fair or festival held in the district headquarters, **Chame**.

Kung (Nye.) – heap or pile.

Kyang (Nye.) – pancakes.

Kyapra (Nye.) – buckwheat.

Kyo (Nye.) – water.

Kyu (Gur.) – water.

Kyung Dzong (Nye., Tib.) – name of the Ghale Raja's first durbar near the village of **Ngawal** in the region of **Nyeshang**. Also called **Tangro**.

La (Tib.) – mountain pass.

La Tsen (Nye.) – prayer conducted during the archery festival.

Lahure (Nep.) – Nepali soldier, who served in the British Gurkha Army.

Lama (Nep.) – 1. A priest or spiritual teacher and mentor. 2. A family name used by some clans in northern areas of Nepal.

Lammergeier – species of vulture.

Lee (Nye., Tib.) – **Torma** symbolizing the devil.

Lhakhang Kye (Nye., Tib.) – main room of a temple or an alter. Literally means god's house.

Lho Sum Tsam (Tib.) – Buddhist retreat for three years, three months and three days.

Lhu (Nye., Tib.) – spirit of the water source or spring.

Lokeshvara (Skt.) – deity of compassion, or the Bodhisattva personifying the compassion of the Buddhas. Also known as **Phakpa Chenrezig** and **Chenrezig** (Tib.), or **Avalokiteshvara**.

Lokpala (Skt.) – four compass directions. Also known as **Chokyong**.

Losar (Tib.) – Tibetan New Year.

Lotangpa (Nye.) – Manangpa New Year.

Maitreya Buddha (Skt.) – Future Buddha, who exists as a **Bodhisattva** until he can return as a simple human and become a **Buddha**, 4000 years after the death of the historical **Shakyamuni Buddha**. Also known as **Jampa**.

Mathi (Nep.) – upper or higher (up or high).

Mahakala (Skt.) – wrathful protector deity of Buddhism with connections to the Hindu deity Shiva. Also known as **Nagpo Chenpo** (Tib.).

Mahayana (Skt.) – 'middle' of the three paths of Buddhism, practiced primarily in China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Tibet, and the Himalayan regions including northern Nepal. It aims to attain enlightenment for all beings and promotes universal compassion to deliver all beings from suffering and its causes. The other two paths are **Hinayana** and **Vajrayana**.

Mala (Nep.) – string of prayer beads.

Maltah (Nye.) – special food made of rice flour cooked with **ghee** , salt, sugar, and dried cheese.

Manangbhot (Nep.) – people from Manang District.

Mandala (Skt., Tib. - **kyil khor**) – a spiritual diagram

Mani Dhunghuree (Nye., Tib) – chanting the prayer **'Om Mani Padme Hum'** one hundred thousand times.

Mani Rilbu (Tib.) – sacred "pill" given by a **lama**.

Mani wall – wall of religious stones.

Manjushri (Skt.) – **Bodhisattva** of Wisdom, or a personification of the body aspect and wisdom of all the Buddhas. Manjushri is regarded as the first divine teacher of Buddhist principles. Also known as **Jampelyang** (Tib.).

Mantra (Skt.) – sacred syllable that evokes a state of being or insight. A chant that, when recited, protects the mind of the practitioner from delusion and invokes the particular deity in the form of sound.

Man-tay (Nye.) – people from Manang Village in the region of Nyeshang.

Marpo (Tib.) – red **torma**.

Metha (Nye.) – archery festival. Also called **Dhachang**.

Mathi (Nep.) – up, above, or upper.

Metyela Atabba (Nye.) – mythical being. Literally means not supposed to take a name.

Milarepa – sage, poet, mystic, and Buddhist teacher born in Tibetn in 1040. Milarepa attained the supreme enlightenment in the course of only one lifetime, something that has never been replicated. Literally means cotton-clad Repa.

Mindo (Nye.) – flowers.

Mit (Nep.) – bond of brotherhood.

Molam (Tib., Nye.) – final prayer during the **Partutheytol** ceremony as part of funeral rites.

Mrie (Nye.) – turquoise or jade.

Mrigas (Nep.) – deer.

Mue (Nye.) – money.

Mung Ma Nag (Nye.) – down below (in the forest).

Nagpo Chentp (Tib.) **Mahakala** (Skt.) – wrathful protector deity of Buddhism with connections to the Hindu deity Shiva.

Nandhi (Nye.) – sponsors.

Narshing (Tib.) – type of musical instrument.

Nar-tay (Nye.) – people from the region of Nar. Literally means people who sit in Nar.

Naya (Nep.) – new or newer.

Nei (Nye.) – secret place.

Norbu (Tib.) – wish fulfilling gem.

Nupa (Tib.) – spiritual power. Also known as **Shakti** (Nep.).

Nyang-mi (Nye.) – "Our People".

Nyenthea (Nye.) – maternal home.

Nyeshang (Tib., Nye.) – region of upper Manang. Literally means us from Shang, an area in Tibet.

Nyeshangpa (Tib.) – name for people from upper Manang. Literally the people from Shang, a region of Tibet.

Nyeshang-tay (Nye.) – people from the region of Nyeshang. Literally to 'sit' in Nyeshang.

Nyingmapa (Tib.) – original sect of Tibetan Buddhism, following the original teaching and practices of **Guru Rinpoche**. Also known as the 'Old Translation School'.

Nyungne (Tib.) – ritual of fasting and prayers to the deity **Chenrezig**.

Odar (Nep.) – cave or rock shelter.

Om Mani Padme Hum (Skt.) – most common **mantra** in Buddhism, meaning 'hail the jewel in the lotus'.

Opame (Tib.) – Buddha of Infinite Light. Also known as **Amitabha Buddha**.

Padhe (Nye.) – three-yearly festival enacting the oral tradition of the Manangpa.

Pakre – name for the eastern end of the Lamjung **Himal**.

Pani (Nep.) – water.

Partutheytol (Nye., Tib.) – ceremony conducted by a **lama** to help guide a dead spirit along the path to heaven.

Pecha (Tib.) – prayer books that contain the words of the Buddhist **Dharma**.

Peerukanda (Nye.) – necklace made of turquoise, coral, and gold.

Pey Koen (Nye.) – woolen **koen** worn in winter.

Phaki (Nye.) – long sash worn with a **koen**.

Phakpa Chenrezig (Tib.) – deity of compassion, or the Bodhisattva personifying the compassion of the Buddhas. Also known as **Chenrezig, Avalokiteshvara,** or **Lokeshvara** in Sanskrit.

Phi (Nye.) – rice wine.

Phedi (Nep.) – base or bottom of a hill or cliff.

Phenei – horse racing festival held only in the village of **Pisang** in the region of **Nyeshang**.

Phenpa (Tib.) – to reserve.

Phopey (Nye.) – paternal sub-clan.

Phowa (Tib.) – ritual performed with someone dies.

Phurba (Nye.) – ritual dagger.

Phu-tay (Nye.) – people from the village of **Phu** in the region of Nar.

Pima (Nye.) – to cooperate, or cooperative.

Pi-tay (Nye.) – people from the village of Pisang.

Pokhari (Nep.) – pond or small lake.

Pongpa-tay (Nye.) – people from the village of **Ngawal**, also called the village of Pongpa.

Puja (Nep.) – ritual or prayer.

Putul (Nye.) – gold bangles or bracelets.

Rae (Nye.) – rib.

Raja (Nep.) – king.

Ramnye (Nye., Tib.) – dedication prayer or blessing.

Rani (Nep.) – queen.

Rigsum Gompo (Tib.) – depiction of **Chenrezig** (compassion), **Jampelyang** (wisdom), and **Vajrapani** (spiritual power). These three qualities are essential for enlightenment.

Ringha (Tib.) – round crown.

Rinpoche (Tib.) – title for a reincarnate or a highly accomplished **lama**.

Rolang (Nye.) – dead spirits or skeletal ghosts.

Rongpa (Tib.) – lowland people or people who come from below Manang District.

Rhu (Nye.) – horn.

Sanskrit – ancient language of India. Many words are Sanskrit, abbreviated Skt.

Sey Ngorba (Nye.) – food offerings to a deceased person.

Shakyamuni Buddha (Skt.) – historical **Buddha** who lived in what is now Nepal and India and attained full enlightenment during the 5th century BC. His teachings are the foundation of the Buddhist faith.

Shakyapa – one sect of Tibetan Buddhism.

Shaman – spirit medium.

Shastra (Skt.) – theoretical Buddhist teachings.

Shikari (Nep.) – hunter.

Shitro (Tib.) – prayer performed during funeral rights to reconcile peaceful and wrathful aspects of one's Buddha-nature.

Shra-row (Nye.) – group of unmarried friends of the same age.

Shukpa (Nye., Tib.) – juniper.

Shya (Nye.,Tib.) – meat.

Shyalchep – signifies **torma**.

Shyapsil (Tib.) – pure lakes.

Stupa (Skt.) – Buddhist monument symbolizing the Buddha's enlightenment. Stupas are the most typical Buddhist monuments and are found in a variety of forms in all Buddhist countries. They often contain the relics of enlightened beings or lamas. Also known as **Chorten** (Tib.).

Subbha (Nep.) – tax collector or chief magistrate of the salt trade.

Sukeko (Nep.) – dry or dried.

Sur (Nye., Tib.) – wheat powder burnt on coals and offered to the spirits, especially of deceased family members, who are able to consume only the smell of the burnt food.

Ta (Nye., Tib.) – horse.

Tahr – Himalayan goat.

Tama Shanga (Nep.) – copper bowl.

Tamdrin (Tib.) – wrathful manifestation of **Avalokiteshvara**. Also known as **Hayagriva**(Skt.) .

Tantra (Skt.) – mystical Buddhist teachings.

Tara (Skt.) – female **Bodhisattva** who symbolizes purity and fertility and protects the people of Tibet. Also known as **Dolma**.

Tawa (Tib.) – monk.

Tengyur (Tib.) – translation of the commentaries on the historical **Shakyamuni Buddha's** discourses, particularly relating to scientific philosophy and magic.

Thang (Nye.) – meadow or pasture.

Thickchu (Tib., Nye.) – signifies water.

Thog-shing (Tib., Nye.) – kind of special wood.

Thong (Tib., Nye.) – spinning wheel used by women.

Tongje (Tib.) – blessing performed after **Phowa** when someone dies.

Torma (Tib.) – ritual object, often moulded from **tsampa** and butter, which can symbolize a deity, a mandala , an offering , or occasionally a weapon to fight negative forces.

Trilbu (Skt.) – bell, symbolic of the female principle. Use in combination with the **dorje** or **vajra**.

Tsampa (Tib., Nye.) – roasted barley flour and other grains. Tsampa is a staple food in the Tibetan Plateau and the Himalaya.

Tsekang (Tib.) – prayer room in a house.

Tsemdi (Tib.) – sacred string given by a lama to tie around the neck.

Tso (Nye., Tib.) – lake.

Tsog (Nye., Tib.) – offering, often of cooked rice.

Tulku (Tib.) – recognized reincarnation of a lama, who is usually found in childhood and brought up to inherit the lineage and monastery of their predecessor.

Tyala Shal (Tib.) – pressed earthen bricks.

Utta (Tib.) – hair, particularly the hair of **Guru Rinpoche**.

Vaishravana (Skt.) – deity of the North, also known as the God of Wealth.

Vajra (Skt.) – thunderbolt or diamond, symbolic or indestructibility and used to represent skillful means of compassion. Used in conjunction with a **Trilbu** that symbolizes the wisdom of emptiness. Also known as **Dorje** (Tib.).

Vajrapani (Skt.) – the Bodhisattva of Spiritual Power. Also known as **Chana Dorje**.

Vajrayana (Skt.) – 'diamond vehicle' tradition as one of the three paths of Buddhism. It was developed by **Guru Rinpoche** and uses special techniques for a quicker but more difficult path to enlightenment. The other two paths are **Hinayana** and **Mahayana**.

Wisdom – the ability to correctly understand emptiness and the nature of the mind.

Yak (Tib.) – high altitude bovine, indigenous to the Tibetan Plateau and Himalaya. A female yak is a nak.

Yartung (Nye.) – horse racing festival.

Yaru (Nye.) – yak horn.

Yuga Drag Thang (Tib.) – Mountain of Heaven. Also known as **Oble Dome** (Gur.), and **Swarga Danda** (Nep.).

Zigden (Tib., Nye.) – lay person who is not a monk, priest, teacher, or nun.

Zopkyo (Tib.) – yak crossbred with a cow. Also known as **Chauri** (Nep.).

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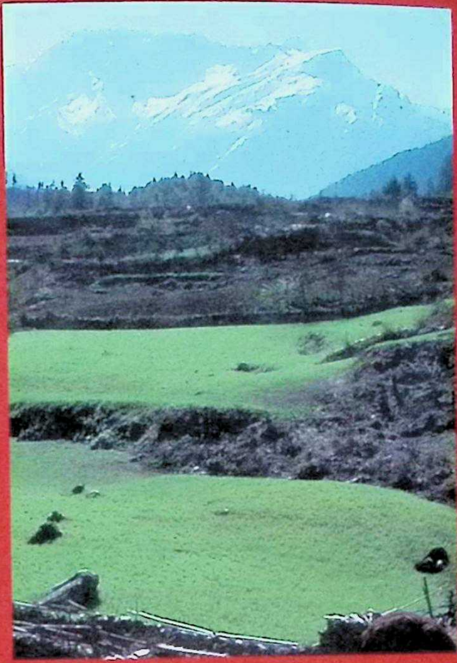
"This mountain place has made us who we are as a people, our language and our culture."

This book is for the curious, for those of you who wish to delve into the life and times, current and past, of the people of Manang so that you will experience more than just the powerful river gorges and mountain peaks.

We hope to introduce you to the rich cultural history, dynamic geography, and melodic languages of the Manang Valley. By presenting the rich oral tradition of legends and myths, we hope to evoke a deeper understanding and appreciation for the adventurous and spiritual Manangpa people, the age-old fortress ruins, the Buddhist Gompas (temples) and monasteries, the Lamas (priests) and monks, hand-crafted spiritual artefacts, and colourful festivals.



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